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# PORTRAITS OF THE PROPHETS

CHARACTER STUDIES OF MEN
WHO BLAZED THE TRAIL

BY
J. W. G. WARD, D.D. 1879-
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, DETROIT, MICHIGAN;
FORMERLY OF TOLLINGTON PARK, LONDON, AND
EMMANUEL CHURCH, MONTREAL

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"There are pioneer souls
That blaze their paths
Where highways never ran."

*S. W. Foss.*

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# BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

## *BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION*

There is a statue in Leicester Square, London, that is somewhat out of the usual track. Set in the centre of a tree-shaded plot it is conceivable that, amidst the swirling traffic and haste of the city, comparatively few have noticed it. It is a memorial to the immortal Shakespeare. As we look upon it, thinking of the changes that have taken place since the dramatist himself walked those streets, there comes to mind Ben Jonson's familiar line, "Not of an age, but for all time." It is a true and not unworthy tribute to that colossal genius. Yet he is not the only one who merits such praise. What of the men who, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, spake and wrote centuries before him? Their words were pregnant with celestial fire. They had a message to the day in which they lived. But God limits not the good to any one period, and the prophetic pages still shine with light to illumine the wayfarer. They have still some vital import for the perplexed and the discouraged. Truly, those valiant souls were "not of an age, but for all time." They blazed a trail by which God could come to man, and man to God. The idea is borrowed from the old explorers and pioneers, who cut their way through virgin forests. With an axe, they made a

slanting incision in the bark of the trees they passed. These marks, gleaming white in the dim woodlands, provided unfailing direction for those who followed. In one sense that was what these early witnesses for Jehovah did.

It must be frankly conceded that for many the Old Testament has lost its fascination. The paths these ancient prophets marked out for the feet of their fellows have been overgrown. The tangled maze of history, the rise and fall of kings and dynasties, are confusing. How was it that the kingdom so laboriously built up by David, became divided into Israel and Judah? Why the ceaseless alarums of warring nations without, sieges and spoliation within, Israel's boundaries, and at length exile in a distant land?

These are points to be grasped if the work of the prophets is to be accurately appraised. But once the position is made clear, and those representatives of the Almighty placed in their correct setting, as far as that can be determined, and they are seen in true perspective. The throb of their great utterances is felt. A new significance invests their words. And while they spoke to the necessity of their own times, the eternal element with its bearing upon our modern life is discerned.

When David relinquished the sceptre to his son, Solomon, there were also bequeathed to him grandiose schemes and accumulated wealth with which to carry them out. He was ambitious, as well as lavish

in his ideas. Vast building projects, including the Temple, were undertaken. A marriage with Pharaoh's daughter linked him to the reigning house of Egypt, while a treaty with Hiram, king of Tyre, gave him prestige in the west. But the ostentatious display and luxury in the court meant unrest and dissatisfaction among the populace. Taxation and forced labour, coupled with the king's almost despotic treatment of the northerly tribes, made the land seethe like a cauldron. Why should the country be bled white merely to gratify the royal whim for ornate architecture and senseless extravagance? The question was asked by men whose hearts were bitter with their wrongs. Then a spokesman was found. Jeroboam, a young Ephraimite, working as an overseer of the building of the fortifications, headed a revolt against the established order. This was sternly put down. With the failure of his plot, Jeroboam fled for his life, but the fires still smouldered. At Solomon's death, they burst forth again.

Rehoboam, a weak yet obstinate ruler, who succeeded his father, received a deputation from the people. It urged that the crushing burdens should be lightened, needless expenditure curtailed, and a saner policy instituted. These requests were flatly refused. And disruption that might easily have been obviated rent the country in twain. Although a belated attempt to regain the allegiance of the Ten Tribes was made, Judah lost them forever. Hostility

and mutual recrimination had displaced loyalty and goodwill. Thus we find now two separate realms: Judah, the southern kingdom, and Israel, the northern kingdom, the latter with its capital first at Shechem, and then the city of Samaria.

Jeroboam was acclaimed king of the seceding tribes. He organized the new nation, and set up two centres of worship, in Dan and Beth-el, metal bulls being used as the tokens of Jehovah. The object was to provide rallying points for the sacred festivals, thus making it unnecessary for pilgrims to go to Jerusalem from that time. But to introduce images was in reality debasing Jewish worship to a heathen plane, and this was afterwards referred to with repugnance by the sacred historians, Jeroboam being described by them as "the man who made Israel to sin." Any throne founded by an upstart revolutionary is precarious. Nadab, who followed his father, was murdered after two years by Baasha who assumed the crown. Elah and Zimri each reigned for brief periods. Then Omri, an army officer, engineered a counter-revolution which, supported by the soldiery, secured him the crown. He was the founder of a new dynasty; he also finds mention in the Assyrian inscriptions.

We now reach the period of his son Ahab, whose name is more familiar. Ahab was at the outset a doughty warrior who distinguished himself in the conflict with Syria. The pressure of that rising

world-power caused him to renew the alliance with Phœnicia that both Solomon and Omri had made. He cemented the bond by marrying Jezebel, the daughter of Eth-Baal, who was both king of Tyre and the priest of Astarte. It was almost inevitable that Jezebel, when she became Ahab's queen, should favour the form of worship to which she had been long accustomed. It would not only strengthen her hold on the nation, but also give greater leverage for carrying out her plans. The Tyrian Baal was, therefore, installed in Samaria. The degrading practices of that cult, lead by a large company of priests imported from Phœnicia, disintegrated the morals of the people. Ahab weakly acquiesced in the fanaticism of his wife, and the spiritual state of Israel rapidly went from bad to worse. It was at this juncture that God raised up that staunch and fearless witness to the truth, Elijah.

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## ELIJAH, THE INVINCIBLE

A prophet of Israel, the approximate date of his work, B.C. 876, when Ahab, with his consort, Jezebel, governed the Northern Kingdom.

## *I. ELIJAH*

There is no more romantic figure in the Old Testament than Elijah, the Tishbite. He stands before us like a great mountain peak. There is something majestic and awe-inspiring, in the solitude that marked his life, and the way he dominated the day in which he lived. Of his origin we know nothing, though probably he came from the tree-clad hills of Gilead, fringing the desert on the east of Jordan. He was nurtured amid hardships. Familiar with Nature in all her moods, he had most in common with her when her passions were aroused, when the roaring torrents rushed through rocky defiles, and when the thunders rolled among the uplands. He was a true man of the wilds. We have sufficient evidence in the records to suggest that he was of sturdy frame, of iron constitution, of rugged and commanding personality. We find him able to sustain a long fast. He frequently slept with no other roof than the indigo dome of heaven. At other times the caves and fastnesses of Israel were his home. He was the prototype of John the Baptist, who, coming from the vales of Jordan, conscious of a great mission to which he had been summoned, was prepared to spend himself lavishly and without stint. Whether it meant sacri-

fice or suffering did not weigh with either of them. Both in the finest way embody that spirit that might well declare:

> "Set honour in one eye and death i' the other,
> And I will look on both indifferently:
> For let the gods so speed me as I love
> The name of honour more than I fear death."

We visualize Elijah as tall and erect, with untrimmed hair and beard, his face and chest tanned with exposure to the sun and wind. His garments are of the simplest kind, and the gnarled staff and stout sandals complete the picture of robust and virile manhood, with a disciplined will and nerves of steel. He was a perpetual rebuke to life as he found it. His asceticism was in itself in forceful contrast to the moral laxity and enervating customs that had spread under the rule of Ahab and his Phœnician consort, Jezebel. But that was only a small part of the protest he came to make. In Elijah, prophecy became a practical force, meant to shape both daily conduct and the destiny of the people. He found himself surrounded by those who had been seduced from the highway trodden by their fathers—that of willing obedience to Jehovah. If Jezebel had strengthened Ahab's position by the compact made between Phœnicia and Israel, she had weakened the kingdom by lowering its morale. Apart from the abominable ceremonial associated with the worship of her deities, she exercised a baneful influence on the

court. It may be that there was, in addition, some other power behind the throne—a hidden hand. We have seen in modern times how an unprincipled religionist, like the rascal monk, Rasputin, can play for pre-eminence. This man, asserting his sway over the unhappy Czarina of Russia, cast an evil spell upon her. She became like clay to his touch. His crude magic and her credulity are almost an insult to the average intelligence. Yet the fact remains. The Czarina moved the will of her husband and moulded his policy. While the voice was the voice of the Czarina, the hand pulling the strings was that of Rasputin.

To some extent, a similiar state of things prevailed in the palace of Ahab. He was king. Although jealous of his royal prerogative, apparently he failed to realize how much he was subordinated to his arrogant and superficial wife, who, faithful to her upbringing, was bent on entrenching the religion of her own race in the midst of Israel. God sometimes veils His presence from the eyes of men. It may even seem as though He were indifferent to what goes on in the world. Yet, as Lowell reminds us:

> ". . . Behind the dim unknown
> Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

The springs of life were contaminated. Faith was almost extinct. The whole fabric of the social order

was undermined. But at the psychological moment, the champion of Jehovah appeared. He was a patriot as well as a prophet. He loved his country because he loved his God, and he was prepared to do battle for righteousness. Religion to him was the prime reality, as wide in its sweep as life itself. It must be remembered that ever since the conquest of Palestine, the Israelites had given some adherence to the gods of the Canaanites. Elijah would be so familiar with this that it would at first excite no question in his mind. When, however, Jezebel brought in the worship of Baal, that was another matter. The whole situation had to be reviewed. Clear discrimination must be made between the false and the true. The rights of Jehovah were being openly challenged. Wellhausen sums up the position cogently when he says, "Baal and Yahweh represented, so to speak, a contrast of principles, of profound and ultimate practical convictions; both could not be right, nor could they exist side by side. For him there existed no plurality of superhuman powers operating with equal authority in different spheres, but everywhere one holy and mighty Being, who revealed Himself, not in the life of nature, but in those laws by which alone mankind is held together, in the ethical demands of the spirit."

Yielding to an impulse well-nigh overwhelming, this uncouth figure, so out of place in the sumptuous environment of the king, strode into the royal pres-

ence. The moment was dramatic in the extreme. Without a word of introduction, the prophet, gazing into the shifty eyes of Ahab, exclaimed, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." It was like a thunderbolt. Before the monarch could collect himself, or frame a retort sufficiently biting, Elijah had turned swiftly and disappeared. Down eastward to the brook Cherith he made his way, where he awaited further directions from God. There the ravens were to sustain him; the stream while it still ran, would quench his thirst. But later, like many a spring of human strength and comfort, those waters dried up, and he was forced on his way.

Again following the divine guidance, Elijah crossed to the region from which Jezebel herself had come. What was the object of that? It is possible only to hazard a guess. Believing as we do, however, that there is a purpose in every prompting of God, there was perhaps some lesson to learn, some further experience meant to equip him for the part he was to play. He took up his abode with a widow on whom the pressure of need, caused by the famine that now overspread the land, rested heavily. At the point of desperation, she was gathering sticks to cook the last morsel of food for her boy and herself. But Elijah's advent brought reassurance. While he remained, and while the rains were withheld, the meal in her

barrel was to be miraculously replenished, even as the oil in her cruse.

Too much cannot be said in praise of this heathen woman's generous hospitality. How was she to know that Elijah—unprepossessing in appearance, of strange tongue and wild mien—was what he claimed to be? But the fact was there; her household stores were not depleted. And yet her kindness was rewarded, with what? One of those bewildering dispensations of Providence which make us all ask at times whether it goes well with those who would fain do right. Her one joy in life was taken from her. The boy in whom all her hopes centred, for whom she had made those sacrifices which only motherhood can measure, died. Her bitterness can readily be imagined. It is pardonable. Facing Elijah, she cried, reproachfully, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

Her sin—her son? What did she mean? Was this another instance in which "Conscience does make cowards of us all"? We cannot tell. But we can confidently affirm that all sorrow is not necessarily the result of wrong-doing. Of her past we have no record; of her gracious attitude towards this wandering prophet, we have abundant proof. In some way, however, she attributed the calamity that had befallen her to the coming of Elijah. Was there any connection? It is singular that, when trials come, we

often render ourselves less fit to confront them by worrying as to their moral cause. While it goes without saying that sin inevitably brings loss and sorrow, it is also true, as we have pointed out, that there are experiences which are intended, not as a penalty for wrong-doing, but as the divine method of enriching the soul. That seems to be the clew to the mystery before us. The widow had sown good seed in helping this man of God. She had given him the shelter of her home, humble though it was. And in gracious ministrations she had unconsciously been serving Jehovah's cause. Should she not also reap some benefit in return? Elijah took the dead child from the arms of the distraught mother. Perhaps, like many a man, he was distressed by the sight of a woman's uncontrollable grief. Bearing the little fellow to his own chamber he raised his cry to the Infinite, "O Lord my God, hast Thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" He, too, was troubled by this tragic event. But his prayer was heard; the child revived. Elijah carried him back to the mother who had been pacing the room in her agony. She could hardly believe her eyes. Her child lived! From the depths of despair to the sun-kissed slopes of joy, she was lifted as by angel wings. "Now by this," she exclaimed, "I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

Where formerly she had been puzzled by this

gaunt figure, sometimes muttering as he mused by the fire, who now and then had clenched his fists in detestation of the people's sinfulness and the iniquities of their king, she now began to comprehend him, and the God he served. Her religious experience had been, doubtless, bound up entirely with the deities of her own land. They had been unheeding and callous, as the idol must ever be. To find One who was not vindictive, but merciful; not uncaring, but compassionate, was indeed a revelation. This meant much to her, but it also meant something to Elijah. Before he could rightly represent Jehovah he must know Him intimately for himself. He must feel the tenderness of God's heart, and its responsiveness to human need. Only out of personal contact with Him could he make the Supreme real to others.

The months passed. The country had been seared, as it were, with the hot breath of a dragon from the primeval slime. The spectres of desolation and famine ranged the land. The word of the Lord came to Elijah, assuring him that the end of the drought was in sight, and bidding him return to Ahab with the glad tidings. It was a long and tedious journey over scorched soil, past ruined olive-yards, through defiles where the dried-up watercourses seemed a fitting symbol of a nation whose faith in God had gone. The prophet reached Samaria and, as he went to the palace, he met Obadiah, a prefect in Ahab's household. This man had displayed a fine spirit towards some

whose lives had been threatened by Jezebel. When their loyalty to Jehovah had aroused the queen's wrath, Obadiah had hidden a hundred of them in a cave, and there supplied them with food. Now, however, he was concerned with the affairs of his master, and was trying to find sufficient provender to keep the few remaining horses and mules alive.

From Obadiah, the prophet learned that a price had been set on his head. "There is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee." But Elijah was undismayed. He bade him tell the sovereign that he had returned. Obadiah was dubious about such an errand. When he came back, would the prophet have vanished again? Elijah's movements had been so erratic, his appearances and disappearances so surprising, that apparently some believed that he possessed magical power to change his location at will. But Elijah gave his promise that Obadiah could depend on him. "As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him today."

Ahab, striving to regain the masterful air with which formerly he had met Elijah, though unable to conceal the lines of anxiety upon his face, fiercely demanded "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" There was a slight shrug of the prophet's shoulders. He threw up his beard, and with eyes that flashed and words that burned, replied, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye

have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

These were not stout words without corresponding strength of purpose. Elijah had tossed down the gauntlet. The time for trifling had passed. No longer must the king be permitted to trail God's people behind the chariot of the Phœnician priesthood. The issue must be decided without further delay. During his retirement in Zarephath, Elijah had felt the gravity of Israel's position. That Jehovah and the Canaanitish gods, to which we have already referred, had long been worshipped conjointly, had not previously disturbed him. Now, he saw things in a new light. Jehovah was not, and could not be, a God among many. He was supreme. That supremacy must be demonstrated. Thus Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to settle the matter once for all. They were to build an altar with its sacrifice. He would do the same. And the god which answered by fire was to be acknowledged as alone worthy of Israel's allegiance. Reluctantly they were compelled to accept his terms. To decline them would have been to admit defeat at the outset. They could only hope that Baal would respond. It was his honour as much as theirs that was at stake.

The people assembled, looking with wondering eyes at the men who alternately prostrated themselves before Baal, crying in piteous tones for his intervention. Meanwhile, Elijah stood by. He was merciless

as he exulted at their discomfiture. Midday came, but no answer had been vouchsafed to the supplications of the priests. "Cry aloud," taunted Elijah, "for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." With the frenzy of their class, they gashed themselves with their knives to arouse the notice of their deity. Finally, day wore to evening, and still "there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." It was then that Elijah called for the attention of the people. He bade them rally around the stones he had set up, and sought the assistance of some of their men. Barrels of water were filled. Three times these were emptied over the offering. The thoughtful may ask how this was possible after three years without rain. The sceptical have made merry over the improbability of such a happening. We have, however, merely to look at the situation of Carmel to dispose of the difficulty. Carmel is by the sea, and there is nothing in the sacred narrative to suggest for a moment that fresh water was used.

Elijah, with unwavering faith and confident bearing, lifts his prayer to heaven. "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that

Thou hast turned their heart back again." The fire fell upon the altar, consuming the oblation, and enveloping the trenches. The effect on the crowd was instantaneous. The people bowed themselves to the earth, chanting in Eastern fashion "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."

A brutal massacre of the priests followed. Evidently aroused to the highest pitch of excitement, the disillusioned people vented their anger on those who, at Jezebel's instigation, had ground them under their heel. Elijah then returned to the king. Ahab, trembling at the remembrance of his own apostasy, was filled with fear lest Jehovah would avenge it. But this time the prophet had a word of mercy to speak. "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." Climbing to the summit of Carmel, Elijah, accompanied by his servant, waited for the sign. Seven times in all the youth looked out over the sea. Then in the brazen sky, a cloud betokening that after those weary years relief was at hand, slowly took shape. The time of testing had ended.

News of the tremendous happenings on Carmel was carried to the queen. It lashed her to fury. Not only had her gods been discredited, but also her own authority now stood in jeopardy. Her eyes blazed with passion. Calling one of her bodyguard, she bade him haste after the prophet before he passed beyond their borders. Learning that Elijah had gone

to Jezreel, the man delivered Jezebel's message: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them, by tomorrow about this time." Elijah listened unperturbed. Had the threat been written, he would, doubtless, have torn it up, and flung the fragments in the insolent face of its bearer. As it was, he stared haughtily before him and without a word went on his way. Why should he be perturbed? It was only an idle vaunt. Had there been anything in it, would Jezebel have sent to warn him first? A dagger-thrust in the dark, or an ambush in a quiet by-path, would have served her purpose better. The prophet saw that. Her knowledge of what Jehovah had done, and fear of retribution, rendered her impotent. Moreover, though it was long after that the Psalmist said, "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" some glimmering of that truth had already been seen by Elijah. Acting in accordance with the divine will, no evil could befall him.

Swift in the wake of exultant triumph over his adversaries, however, came black despair. Elijah was only human after all. Notwithstanding his fine physique, he was subject to the reaction which follows a time of strain. That brings him near to us all. We know what it means, sometimes, to be endowed with almost supernatural energy in an emergency. In business stress or domestic anxiety, when a situation has to be grappled with, or the exactions

of the sick-room must be met, we can do what would, in ordinary circumstances, be beyond us. Still, the price must be paid. The pendulum swings to the other extreme. Instead of resourcefulness, there is weakness; instead of poise and power, nervelessness and depression grip the heart. So it was with Elijah. Casting himself down in the shelter of a stunted bush, he abandoned himself to despondency. It was not self-pity. That is the last sin of which Elijah could be accused. It was rather desperation born of apparent failure.

Had he failed? Who did more to restore the faith of the hesitant, and re-establish pure religion than he? He had upheld the banner of God and right, and, further, his authority had been divinely acknowledged. On the other hand, perhaps Elijah was convinced that the protestations of the people amounted to little. They had temporarily forsaken Baal, but was the poison eliminated from their blood? Could any such savage onslaught achieve lasting spiritual results? On reflection he doubted it. Even he, in spite of his limited light, felt that he had allowed his zeal to outstrip his judgment. Nor was a sense of his own unworthiness entirely lacking. "It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." God has graciously ordered it that when the heart has sustained a heavy blow, or has passed through a crisis, there are compensations. To this exhausted prophet came food,

drink and sleep. Best of all, there was the sympathetic voice. We often regard these things as commonplace. They may be God's way of succouring the downcast. With wearied bodies and jaded minds we return from the city, or lay down the tasks of the day. But the ministries of home, the healing touch of love's fingers, the reassuring word, can restore flagging energies and quicken us for further striving. They are also essential to wider coöperation with God and a larger knowledge of His will.

In *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, the lady herself relates: "I recollect one time durin' the war, when the soldiers was layin' 'round the camp, tryin' they best to keep from freezin' to death, a preacher come 'long to hold a service. An' when he got up to preach, he sez, 'Friends,' sez he, 'my tex' is Chilblains. They ain't no use a-preachin' religion to men whose whole thought is set on their feet.'" After prescribing some simple remedy, he went on. "'The nex' time I come 'round, yer mind'll be better prepared to receive the Word of the Lord.'" From which, Mrs. Wiggs began to "learn" the children good manners before proceeding with the Sunday-school which met in her kitchen. And so physical well-being was God's first concern before further service was required of Elijah.

Rested and refreshed, he again obeyed the divine leading, and journeyed to Horeb. It was a place of sacred memories. There Moses had felt the presence

of God, receiving inspiration for his mission. Here also Elijah was lifted into vital fellowship with the Unseen. As he stood upon the craggy heights, the storm burst. The tempest, like some ferocious beast breaking from its captors, roared through the valleys, uprooting trees and throwing up great clouds of dust. With a noise like thunder, a huge shelf of rock crashed into a gorge. And the prophet felt a wild delight fill his breast as he beheld the fury of Nature. When the wind had spent itself, suddenly the earth trembled beneath his feet. The very mountain seemed to stagger like a giant reeling from the blow of a mighty adversary. Was this the sign of Jehovah's coming? As his eyes scanned the precipitous slopes, now rent and scarred, a line of fire spread across the woodland, like the advance guard of an army. It mustered force and, rushing forward with its long lances of light, drove the black smoke before it as though the foe were in full retreat. But not in the tempest, the earthquake, nor the fire, was God found. A strange silence wrapped the region about. Nature herself seemed to be on the tip-toe of expectancy. Then in gentlest accents, like music echoing through the dim spaces of a vast cathedral, came "a still, small voice." Some such mood Elijah must have shared with Wordsworth, for the latter says:

> "I have felt,
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

Elijah's discouragement was gone. Resolution flamed up again. The threefold commission to anoint Hazael, king of Syria, Jehu, king of Israel, and Elisha, as successor in the prophetic office, was given to him who had plaintively begged for death. Life was fraught anew with great opportunities. And is it not ever so when God works in the soul? We are painfully aware of our handicaps, and our insufficiency. On the brink of despair, we sometimes stand, irresolute and dispirited. Then come the reassuring accents of God's voice, and His presence dispels our fears. St. Paul knew what it was to reach the limits of his endurance. He had his "thorn in the flesh;" he also experienced the effectual grace of Christ. He recounts his perils and hardships, his persecutions and disappointments, yet with fine optimism, springing not from his own unaided will, but from God's anointing, he could say: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

The shameful means by which subsequently Naboth was deprived of his vineyard shows both the weakness of Ahab, and the ruthlessness of his wife's character. Because the king desired this place, and the owner would not agree to sell it, he was done to death.

Elijah was out of sight, and therefore out of mind. But the word of the Lord came to him, and the prophet was again sent to rebuke the crafty Ahab. He found him sitting there in the coveted garden which had been obtained with the price of blood. Elijah swept in on him like a whirlwind. Might is not right! Ahab realized his guilt as Elijah poured out his indignant remonstrances. And judgment was uttered. The sceptre should be wrested from his wicked grasp. In the very spot where Naboth had been slain, the dogs should lick Ahab's blood, while Jezebel herself would be destroyed.

Another fine attempt on Elijah's part to lead Israel to trust in Jehovah as the all-sufficient One is recorded. Ahaziah, who succeeded Ahab, having met with an accident, sent to the shrine of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to inquire whether he would recover or not. The prophet met the king's servants and demanded, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub?" It reveals Elijah's jealousy for the divine honour. To him God was everything. If was beyond his comprehension that men should thus vainly appeal to idols when the God of all compassion was willing to aid His people.

Eventually, the fact was borne in on the old man's mind that his course was fast nearing completion. He journeyed in company with Elisha from Gilgal to Bethel, visiting the schools of the prophets, and then on to Jericho. Elisha also had learned what filled him

with dismay: Elijah was to be taken from his side. They left Jericho behind. Eager faces watched them pause by the river Jordan, and after a brief delay pass through the divided waters. It was only then that Elijah spoke of what was impending. "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." The hour had come to quit the fray, but with it another was ready to take up the weapons that God's heroic servant was laying down! What could be finer, what more fitting for Elisha who was to carry on the battle, than that the same motives should animate him? It grieved Elijah to see the concern graven on the other's face, although he knew that God's will is always best. With an effort, Elisha looked up. Then in a voice in which emotion strove for the mastery, he said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

With an end suited to one who had, admitting his fallibility, been true to God, the mighty prophet passed to his reward. The mantle that had been the symbol calling Elisha from the plough, and had parted the waters for their feet at Jordan's banks, now rested on the young man. And though Elijah's work remained incomplete, he had transmitted the gift of valiant resistance, of superb desire for God's glory and the people's ennobling, which augured well for the future. Elijah stands in the book of Malachi as one who should turn the hearts of men to better things. He is defined by Jesus as the forerunner of

John the Baptist. He confronts us still as a man who, serving his day and generation in the light of God's purpose, found satisfaction and life's crowning blessing. It is a great thing so to live that our influence may inspire others when our day is done. It is even greater so to leave our impress on human lives that they are emboldened to strive for the good we have failed to secure. Such a thought surely moved the pen of George Eliot when she wrote:

"O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence; live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end in self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues."

## ELISHA, THE PLOUGHMAN-PROPHET

Successor of Elijah, at work during the reigns of:

Jehoram,
Jehu,
Jehoahaz,
Jehoash,

kings of Israel, the approximate period, B.C. 853–798

## *II. ELISHA*

"Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great,
Some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them."

Of the three classes thus described, Elisha belonged to the third. Greatness was thrust upon him. The long drought which had held Israel in its iron grip was at last ended. The welcome rains once more gladdened the thirsty earth. Eager to use the opportunity to the full, the farmers turned their teams into the fields to break the clods for sowing. Elisha's father, Shaphat, was a man of substance, living at Abel-meholah, in Gilead. The extent of his land indicates his wealth, and both are hinted at in the fact that twelve yoke of oxen were ploughing at one time. Elisha was a son of the soil. His father had apparently insisted on a practical training for him, and he could turn a furrow with anyone. It was the one way to fit him for the future as they saw it, for the best means of climbing the ladder of genuine success is to start on the lowest rung.

God had, however, other plans for Elisha. That day, beginning just like the laborious days he knew so well, was, nevertheless, to mark an epoch in his life. The oxen were pulling the plough over the

unyielding ground, when, unexpectedly, the venerable prophet, Elijah, appeared. The other men, catching sight of the commanding figure, paused in their work. It was not only an excuse to rest for a few minutes, but also an impulse they could not ignore. Elijah was such a man of mystery. His sudden appearance heralded some grave issue. But unheeding the eager eyes fixed on him, perhaps unaware of the astonishment he had caused, he walked towards Elisha. Was he about to deliver a message to the young master? The men waited with the keenest expectation. Elisha too was filled with curiosity. He noted the erect bearing of the prophet. Truly, he was of noble presence with his flowing beard and knotted staff. No wonder kings and priests quaked at his words! But what could he want among those simple tillers of the land? Surely they had not incurred his censure by their ardent desire to bring the fields under cultivation again? As the prophet drew near, Elisha noticed, with a measure of relief, that he seemed to be looking before him with unseeing eyes. Perhaps he was merely passing along? The two were abreast. A swift movement, and Elijah stripping off his mantle, flung it about the shoulders of the astonished youth. Then he walked on without a word.

It was as though the heavens had opened! Elisha was dumbfounded. Presently he saw like a flash the meaning of that symbolic gesture. It was a call to Jehovah's service. He sped after the receding figure.

"Let me, I pray thee," he gasped, "kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." But strange as the summons had been, Elijah's reply was even more remarkable. "Go back again," he commanded. "What have I done to thee?" That sounds distinctly churlish. Was that the way to treat one who was about to choose what must prove a hard and dangerous path? Surely Elijah had enough insight into human nature to know that spiritual ardour is difficult to arouse. Moreover, a definite decision to follow the right may be lost forever if it be turned aside at the outset. But there was method in his madness! Because Elijah had duly estimated the issues at stake, he did not wish to make the response too easy. Were this young man to see nothing more than the hand that vested him with the cloak, were he to hear only the human call to that high quest, his career were doomed from its inception. His decision required a more convincing reason. He must possess the inner conviction that, despite the apparent lack of encouragement from Elijah, Jehovah had summoned him from the daily vocations of men to a life of consecration. And the means adopted were justified by what followed.

Retracing his steps, his heart swelling with emotion, although his head was singularly cool, Elisha went back to the waiting oxen. The distance was only short, yet there was time enough to make plain the course he must take. He slew the two oxen; they

were his offering to God. The wooden plough and the yoke provided fuel for his altar. And there, with his associates clustering in amazement about him, he presented his sacrifice to the Unseen, and dedicated himself to the work thrust on him from above. There is almost a parallel to this in later history. When Julius Cæsar crossed the Rubicon with his army, he ordered that all the boats used for that purpose should be heaped together on the shore, and there fired. As he saw the flames leaping up, he cried to his men, "Before us lies the territory to be conquered; behind us flows the river. There is nothing for us now but to march forward!" He had burned his boats. In another sense, that is what Elisha did. There could be no retreat, no return to the old life. Henceforth, for good or ill, for better or worse, the way of daring endeavour stretched before him. He belonged to God!

That is no disparagement of the ordinary occupations of life. On the contrary, it is paying the highest tribute to them as a means whereby the soul is prepared for finer and fuller service. Carlyle's words ring true: "Do the duty which lies nearest thee, which thou knowest to be a duty! Thy second duty will already have become clearer. The situation that has not its duty, its ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yes, here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy ideal." In what we are pleased

to term the meaningless tasks of the day, some of the noblest lessons are set. Where shall life be fashioned except amid the strain and stress of the world? Where can we learn patience, and the need for loyalty to principle, or where find scope for those faculties which otherwise might remain dormant, except in contact with our fellow-men? Goethe has well said: "Talent develops itself in solitude; character in the stream of life." It is a divine law that as we are found faithful in life's minor matters, we shall have ampler opportunities. Christ taught this in His parable of the Talents. Elisha is an early illustration of the same thing. Something of his fine manhood may be gauged in various ways. Although the son of a landowner, he was not above humble and arduous toil. He had accepted the conditions of growth without complaint. The filial devotion he bore his parents is mirrored in his request that he might first bid them farewell, even in the hour of that glorious challenge. Such sentiment might have been construed as weakness by one of Elijah's austere temper, or have been considered unworthy in a youth of obscure family to whom this honour had come. But Elisha was true to the promptings within. Then, again, notwithstanding his laborious lot, he was not blind to the nobler things of life, and the call fell on a sensitive conscience and a responsive will.

That is all to the good; yet there were other blessings springing from the position he occupied. He had

learned sympathy with the common heart. He knew the struggles of the people, their unremitting contest with Nature for sustenance, their courage in ill-health and adversity, their appalling burdens under the misrule of Ahab and his statesmen. Through all those years, Elisha had been unconsciously forging golden bands which neither time nor place could change. He was of the same stock. Their wrongs and trials were his. And his subsequent career bears witness to the love which made them one. Burns, who was also called from following the plough, sings:

> "Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire!
> That's a' the learning I desire;
> Then, though I trudge, through dub an' mire
> At pleugh or cart,
> My Muse, though hamely in attire,
> May touch the heart."

And Elisha's feeling was as deep, though his inspiration was higher. The young man's decision speaks volumes also for the influence of his parents, and the gracious environment of home. His response to the divine call may be traced to those who gave him birth. It would not have been unreasonable had Shaphat objected strongly to his son's resolve. He was sacrificing so much. Instead of a secure livelihood, he was confronted with uncertainty; instead of the placid life of the farm, with its solid comforts and ordered ways now that the seasons were normal again, he was taking a plunge into the turbulent waters of national

affairs, where the breath might be well-nigh beaten out of his body, and he himself dashed to destruction. Moreover, this was not the course they had counted on. Many a time, the father had been spurred on to greater diligence in his early struggles, knowing Elisha would reap the fruits of his labour. The farm would be his. The homestead would pass to him, and its old walls would ring with the laughter of his children. Had he been bidden to share the work of an honoured priest of Jehovah, as Samuel had that of Eli, it would have been different. But Elijah was so stern, so uncompromising, so hotly detested by those in authority! Add together all these facts which might have weighed against Elisha's decision, yet we hear no word of complaint. No restraining hand is laid on him. The command was of God, not of man: that was conclusive. To their lasting credit, be it said, neither father nor mother made it harder for Elisha to take that step entailing both deprivation and danger.

With such material on which to work, Elijah could do much. Although Elisha was nominally his servant, the prophet knew full well that he was training his successor for the mission he must leave incomplete. The mantle that had been the symbol of the young man's commission, would one day be his most precious possession. And Elijah rejoiced in the zealous spirit by his side. They were at one in many ways. Elisha deplored, even as he did, the evils resulting from a

nation's betrayal of God, and the dire consequences of idolatry. There was in his heart a passionate love for Israel which shot up at times with indescribable brightness. There was also a deep sense of human need, and a desire to heal the untended sores of the people, such as Elijah, stern and censorious, and prone to denounce the evils of the times, had never felt. Truly, God had chosen a suitable man to fill the prophetic office.

The passing months only deepened Elisha's purpose. At first, he shrank from the obligations devolving upon him. Then a steadying thought filled his mind with peace: God required naught of any man but that for which grace could fit him. The promise made through Moses remained valid for all time. The God who inspired it would also keep it. "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be." The path of service might be stony and steep, but the messenger would be divinely sustained. Fears were strangled at their birth. With stout heart and upturned face, he girded himself for his God-given rôle.

Although Elisha nerved his heart as time went on to face the inevitable separation from his master, he was yet moved to the depths of his being when, at length, the hour of parting drew near. Elijah, whom he revered, was about to leave him. The well-intentioned words of the sons of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho pierced his soul: "Knowest thou that the

Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" He knew it only too well. Together, he whose conflict was almost ended, and he whose spurs had still to be won, crossed Jordan. There were a thousand things Elisha wanted to say, but the hour was too sacred for speech, and they walked on in silence. The very earth seemed to hold her breath as though some misfortune were imminent. Laying his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder, and looking into his tear-misted eyes, Elijah bade the young man frame his last request before the strong ties that had held them were severed. It was then that Elisha saw that, if he were to carry on the gigantic ministry of his master, he must be endued with power. Thus one boon surpassed all others. If only a double-portion of Elijah's spirit might be his, then his limitations might no longer hamper him.

The "double-portion" was the usual heritage of the first-born. It symbolized both sonship and succession. It was not that Elisha was ambitious to become a greater prophet than Elijah, but because he felt that, only as he held some claim to pre-eminence among the sons of the prophets, could he give that moral leadership so greatly required. Undoubtedly it was a hard thing to ask, but as Elijah passed out of sight, the mantle fell from his shoulders, and, rending his own garments in his grief, Elisha took up the mantle now invested with such solemn significance for him. Recrossing Jordan to those who had stood watching

what occurred, Elisha saw their gaze fastened on him. At first he firmly declined their offers to seek for Elijah, but, seeing the genuine concern in their faces, he consented, though he knew that the quest was in vain. The successor of that valiant servant of the Almighty had been divinely appointed, and Elijah had gone to his reward.

The wondrous works that marked Elisha's prophetic ministry are, for the most part, humanitarian and beneficent. A spring on which the community depended for its water supply, proving unfit for drinking purposes, was purified with salt by the prophet. A widow, whose sons had been arrested for debt, stirred his compassion. The oil she had was multiplied by Elisha's agency. Her debt was paid, and happiness again shed its genial light upon that household.

At Shunem he encountered unexpected kindness at the hands of a woman of that place. She had noticed him pursuing his ministrations from day to day, and she and her husband decided to make provision for this man of God, "which passeth by us continually." A chamber was set apart for him in their home. It was a place he was entitled to call his own, and it would be a priceless boon to one engaged in duties so exacting to have a spot where retirement and peace might be found.

That reminds us of a house in Des Moines. On the front of it is chiselled a quotation from Homer:

"He was a friend to man, and lived in a house by the side of the road." That has been beautifully woven into verse:

"Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by;
The men who are good, and the men who are bad
As good and as bad as I,
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban;
Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
And be a friend to man.

I see from my house by the side of the road,
By the side of the highway of life,
The men who press with the ardour of hope,
The men who are faint with the strife;
But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears,
Both parts of an infinite plan;
Let me live in my house by the side of the road,
And be a friend to man."

The idea embodies the fair grace of hospitality, and the outflowing of that considerateness that strengthens the striving. Sympathy illumines life with a brightness than can penetrate its thickest gloom. But whatever that Shunammite did for the prophet was surely repaid a hundredfold. When, later, the child, that had brought boundless joy to that home, was smitten with sunstroke, it was to Elisha that the afflicted mother went in her extremity. She journeyed to Carmel personally to invoke his aid. Her plea was granted to this extent: Gehazi was sent with

the prophet's staff to lay it upon the child. This was, however, in vain. Elisha himself had to go. Only then was life restored. Have we not seen the same thing? Formal service confers little, if any, benefit. It is only when a warm heart is laid alongside another that virtue goes forth. It is not unlike the thought expressed by Lowell. Sir Launfal flings a coin to the leprous beggar at his castle gate. The man says, "he gives nothing but worthless gold who gives from a sense of duty." Then, long afterwards, Sir Launfal, having failed in his quest for the Holy Grail, came back dispirited, to his home. The beggar was still there. And now, humbled by his defeat, the knight ministers to him with his own hands. The wooden bowl in which he had brought a drink from the stream turned to gold as he lifted it to the sufferer's lips. The water glowed like ruby wine. The coarse wheaten bread was changed to white. The leper was transfigured. He was none other than Christ Himself.

Wherever the prophet went, it seemed that, in contrast to Elijah, his aim was to awaken confidence and trust rather than fear. At Gilgal, Elisha rendered a poisonous dish wholesome. A farmer's offering of twenty loaves from the new barley harvest was miraculously multiplied. The incident of Naaman's healing merits more than a passing word. The commander-in-chief of the Syrian army was afflicted with the malignant disease, leprosy. His wife, having learned from a Hebrew maiden of Elisha's ability to

confer unusual blessings on men, persuaded her husband to seek his help. With a proud retinue, intended probably to impress the prophet with the importance of his suppliant, Naaman went to Samaria. There is a touch of humour in the way in which Elisha received him. Instead of going out and obsequiously bowing before the distinguished visitor, he sent Gehazi to ascertain what was desired. There were no mystic incantations, no magic, no bestowal of amulet or charm. Instead, the simple direction was given that he should go and bathe in Jordan seven times. Naaman was furious. Had he journeyed all the way from Damascus, where the mighty rivers of Abana and Pharpar flowed majestically on their way, to seek relief in that insignificant stream? His servants pacified him. No harm could come of trying it, even if no good resulted. So, somewhat petulant still, he went to Jordan, bathed in its cool flood, and was cured. It is worthy of note that he at once returned to Elisha to express his gratitude, and to admit that he had been in the wrong. He further asked permission to take some soil back with him that he might erect thereon an altar to the Lord. His theory was, of course, that, as a local deity, Jehovah must be worshipped on His own ground. The costly presents with which he sought to pay for the benefit received were firmly refused, and Naaman, with words of benediction in his ears, went on his way.

Gehazi, much more practical-minded than his

master, as he viewed matters, saw an opportunity of profiting by the cure. So overtaking Naaman, he obtained from him two talents of silver and two changes of raiment. With burning indignation, Elisha met his unworthy associate on his return. "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments? . . . " he demanded. "The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman shall cleave unto thee." And Gehazi went out a leper as white as snow!

Elisha recovered an axe head that had been accidentally lost, giving a further example of his willingness to help men in every possible way. But that makes it somewhat difficult to allow for another incident. Some children, who had been calling derisively after the prophet, were afterwards attacked and devoured by two bears. This is interpreted by the sacred historian as a judgment on bad conduct. But it is possible, of course, that we have here, not so much cause and effect, as coincidence. It was alien to the prophet's nature to act with such severity if responsibility for the occurrence be laid at his door.

In the wider sphere of national affairs, Elisha also rendered exceptional service. When the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, mobilized their armies against Moab, the expedition was faced with a lack of water. The seer refused point blank to treat with Jehoram, the dissolute son of Ahab, but to Jehoshaphat, of Judah, he was more favourably disposed. The request for his assistance was granted. He ordered

that trenches be dug, and by morning streams from a distance had collected in the valley, so that the column was saved.

Later, when Syria was constantly raiding Israel, Ben-hadad, suspecting treachery in his ranks, discovered that it was Elisha who was laying bare his plans to his adversaries. He despatched a force to arrest the prophet in Dothan. His would-be captors were smitten with blindness. With a broadly humorous touch, Elisha offered to conduct them to the man they sought. He led them into Samaria and, when their eyes were opened, they found they were at the mercy of their foes. Instead of permitting violence, however, Elisha bade the king feed the men and send them back to their master. It was an anticipation of St. Paul's injunction, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him." And, from that time on, the forays ceased. On another occasion, when Samaria was being starved into submission by the Syrians, and the king was inclined to capitulate, Elisha stood firm. His assurance that, by the following day, instead of hunger there would be food in abundance, seemed beyond the range of probability. During the night, however, tidings of some kind reached the Syrian camp. Perhaps a force was attacking their line of communications, or complications had arisen in their own land. Whatever the reason, the siege was raised, and at dawn, evacuation had taken place.

The closing scenes of Elisha's life, will always be associated with the visit of King Jehoash, Jehu's grandson. He was a youth of promise, and the heart of the aged prophet felt a thrill of satisfaction as he beheld the young monarch standing by his bedside. The ruler was touched by the sight of the veteran, the sands of whose life were fast running out. He uttered the same words which Elisha had once addressed to his own mentor: "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Then as he turned to the window to hide his emotion, it so happened that he looked eastward in the direction of Syria. The prophet laid his hand on that of Jehoash, and commanded him to smite the ground with his arrows. It seemed only the whim of a dying man. To Elisha's disappointment, he struck only three times. If only he had done so five or six times, instead of three, thus exhibiting greater zest and enterprise, averred the other, it would have meant the complete overthrow of those who threatened the nation's peace.

So Elisha laid down his life work. He was not another Elijah: He was himself and a chivalrous self he proved to be. In his pursuit of the right as he saw it, in his devotion to the good of his fellow-men, in his tireless service on their behalf, he is an outstanding figure in the gallery of those heroes who, in the dim dawn of prophecy, prepared the way of the Lord.

## AMOS, THE HEROIC HERDSMAN

A native of Judah, but commissioned to witness against the godlessness of Israel.

Jeroboam II was king.
Date about B.C. 759.

## *III. AMOS*

Although Amos is the first of the Minor Prophets, there is nothing of the "minor" about him, in either calibre or tone. The major key is dominant throughout. It must ever be inexplicable how the Spirit of God, choosing sometimes the most unlikely instruments, can yet capture a human personality and fill it with throbbing life. Emerson has said, with fine discernment: "I conceive a man as always spoken to from behind, and unable to turn his head and see the speaker. In all the millions who have heard the voice, none ever saw the face. As children in their play turn behind each other, and seize one and make him walk before them, so is the Spirit our unseen pilot. That well-known voice speaks in all languages, governs all men, and none ever caught a glimpse of its form. If the man will exactly obey it, it will adopt him, so that he shall not any longer separate it from himself in his thought, he shall seem to be it, he shall be it. If he listen with insatiable ears, wider and greater wisdom is taught him, the sound swells to a ravishing music, he is borne away as with a flood, he becomes careless of his food and of his house, he is the fool of ideas, and leads a heavenly life."

Amos belonged to a peasant family, living in Tekoa, a village standing on the fringe of a plateau

six miles from Bethlehem. The surrounding country was wild and bare. Rough limestone hills hemmed it in on three sides. Eastwards, where the country sloped down for several miles, the outlook was but little more enchanting. Amid these scenes, Amos plied his calling as a herdsman and a tender of sycamore trees. These yielded a small fig-like fruit in much demand by the labouring classes. Whether Amos was a small-holder, working on his own land, or employed by another, is a matter for conjecture. We are inclined to think that he was his own master, eking out a livelihood by this means, his mainstay being the sheep. However, there, in the seclusion of his native pastures, some echo of the world's doings reached him.

Jeroboam II occupied the throne of Israel. The kingdom had under those who preceded him, suffered severely in the wars with Syria. Some possessions both east and west of Jordan had been captured, and Samaria was therefore exposed, not only to Syria's attacks, but also to the roving bands of Moabites. Assyria, a rising power, had been chafing for a long time, like a greyhound straining at its leash. A victorious expedition, headed by Shalmaneser in B.C. 783 and extending over four years—was followed by another under his successor, Asshurdanil, lasting for eighteen years. The only way to Egypt and the south lay through Palestine. So as Belgium has more than once in the course of various

campaigns been trodden down beneath the feet of foreign foes with whom she actually had no quarrel, Palestine frequently found her very existence imperilled. The dread of these smaller nations can well be imagined. During Jeroboam's reign, however, conditions had improved. The Syrian power melted before the advance of Assyria, and Jeroboam not only secured the lost cities, but also acquired some new territory. Under him, and likewise under Uzziah of the Southern Kingdom, the two realms reached a state of affluence equalled only by that prevailing in the time of Solomon.

The worst use to which men can put prosperity is to make it a leaning post, instead of a lever to lift life to higher things. Amid all Israel's luxury and magnificence, the upper classes were rapidly becoming richer and the lower orders poorer. Unhappily, wealth also brought decadence in its wake. Trade with other nations flourished, but intercourse with them brought in elements of pagan beliefs, until the spiritual state of the people had become parlous in the extreme. Foreign customs and fashions were adopted. Extravagance and sensuality on the part of the Court, were copied by the aristocracy and the commercial caste. Dishonesty and unconscionable severity in the collection of debts created animosity between man and man. Added to all this, so-called justice was obtainable only at a given price.

Organized religion had also its disquieting features.

The adoration of the calf introduced by Jeroboam I. still continued. Elijah had, of course, discountenanced and in part uprooted the cultus of Baal, long before. But at Bethel and some of the other shrines, Jehovah was still worshipped in the form of a bull. There was a widespread observance of the prescribed festivals. The sanctuary at Bethel was thronged periodically by devotees from all quarters, but those sacred seasons were turned into a time of revelry. Symbols of spiritual things may be, when rightly used, like wings to a bird; misused, they are shackles, holding the soul to earth when God meant it to mount. An authority on Belgium, after describing one of the most solemn occasions of the year, the procession of the Holy Blood, paints this rather repellent picture. "As evening passes into night the sounds of music and dancing are heard. At the doors people sit drinking around tables placed on the pavement or in the rank poisonous gutter. The hot air is heavy with the smell of decayed fish. Inside the cafés, men and women, old and young, are dancing in the fetid atmosphere to jingling pianos or accordions. The heat, the close, sour fumes of musty clothing, tobacco, beer, gin, fried fish, and unwashed humanity, are overpowering. There are disgusting sights in all directions. Fat women, with red, perspiring faces and dirty fingers, still clutching their rosaries; tawdry girls, field-workers, with flushed faces, dancing with country lads, most of whom are

more than half tipsy; ribald jokes and laughter and leering eyes; reeling, drunken men; maudlin affection in one corner, and jealous disputing in another; crying babies; beer and gin spilt on the tables; and all sorts of indecency and hideous details which Swift might have gloated over or Hogarth painted. This is how the day of the Holy Blood procession is finished by many of the countryfolk. The brutal cabaret comes after the prayers and adoration of the morning!"

This account may be exaggerated; the state of affairs in Israel as recounted to Amos was not. The prophet's ire was roused. Jehovah was freely accorded the patronage of those whom He had so signally favoured, but there devotion began and ended. Favoured? Truly, for had not Syria, their old enemy, been pulled from their throats and beaten down, never to rise again? Had not affluence smiled upon the nation? Surely that indicated that Jehovah was well-disposed towards them, and their recognition of Him in the Sanctuary was not without its reward! He was their Covenant God, and thus under His special protection—as they deemed it—they were secure from any evil that might threaten them. The current watchword was, "Jehovah, God of Hosts, is with us."

Amos lived far remote from the complex circumstances of the Northern Kingdom, but when he went to sell his sheep, or to dispose of the wool or his fruit,

either in Bethlehem or in Jerusalem itself, which was only about twelve miles away, he listened to the talk of the merchants who, travelling from place to place, gathered news of what was going on in Israel. To this man, consumed with love to God and his race, the situation occasioned much misgiving. Trudging back home, he would con things over. Again as he tended his sheep, the silence broken only by the winds in the trees or by the chirping of the birds, he pondered long and earnestly what the future held. Those fields where perhaps David himself had fed his flocks, became vocal with the accents of God.

We are reminded of another herdsman, Cædmon, to whom that voice spoke. According to an early chronicler, he dwelt in the ancient abbey of Hilda, in Whitby. A banquet was in progress at which music and poesy found expression. The simple fellow, however, felt himself entirely out of place. Going to the shed to attend to his cattle, there came One to him in a vision, saying, "Cædmon, sing some song to Me." "I cannot sing," he answered, "for that cause I left the assembly and retired hither, because I could not sing." The other replied, "However, you shall sing." "What shall I sing?" he questioned, "Sing the beginning of created things." Whereon he began to utter the praises of God. Next morning, he related this strange happening to the Abbess, repeating what he had sung. The Abbess was amazed,

and concluding that "heavenly grace had been conferred on him by our Lord," ordered Cædmon to give up tending the cattle, and to enter the religious life of the monastery. He was instructed in the Scriptures, and urged to put into verse whatever knowledge he acquired. As Bede quaintly puts it: "Cædmon, keeping in mind all he had heard, and as it were 'chewing the cud,' converted the same into most harmonious verse; and sweetly repeating the same, made his masters in their turn his hearers."

To Amos came the vibrant call of God. It was irresistible. It broke down all barriers. Just as the command came to Abraham to leave his father's house, and to Moses to quit the palace of Pharaoh, so to this untutored peasant the voice divine said, "Go," and there was nothing to do but to obey. He felt, in some degree, what St. Paul felt more acutely in his day—the imperative necessity of venturing forth as an ambassador of the Most High. As Emerson truly says, "Natures with great impulses have great resources." The mission of Amos was the more onerous because he was sent not to his own people, but to Israel. But with such a man, once the path was made plain, obstacles counted for nothing. He who has faith in God's unalterable purpose is held like the compass-needle to the pole, fixed and constant, no matter what course be steered.

He made his way northwards to Bethel. It was the time of one of the Feasts. The sanctuary, as well as

the city, was filled with well-dressed people, and the advent of this uncouth fellow from the hills excited both surprise and amusement. But as he strode along the busy streets, in his rude attire, there was that regal dignity which clothes a man who knows he is on the King's business. The poise of the head and the free movement of his limbs denoted one who had lived a vigorous, open-air life. Amos was, to use a line from F. W. H. Myers,

> "... Like some iron peak by the Creator
> Fired with the red glow of the rushing morn."

The disdain written on his face as he observed the curious looks of the passers-by was naught compared with the indignation burning in his breast. Was it thus that the descendants of those pioneers who had taken Canaan, built up its commerce, and made the throne of David famous in the earth, were meant to live?

The prophet made his way to the place of solemn meeting. If his coming had caused a sensation, what shall be said of the vehemence of his words? He cared not what priests or people thought. He was prepared for opposition, for he was obeying what Wordsworth calls the "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God! ... Duty!" Whether his portion were to be contemptuous sneers or scathing criticism, that were easier to face than a conscience false to Jehovah. The responsibility had not been self-sought. It had been

laid on him by God. When that is the case, we may confidently expect a man with a message, a preacher whose words will be both powerful and pointed. It was not to discuss current controversies that Amos came, though they were numerous. He had been charged to speak in the divine name about those alliances which Israel had formed, and even more, about the formality and insincerity marring her inner life. More dangerous and insidious than any foe outside her borders, not even excluding Assyria, was her own godlessness, leading to the disparagement of her destiny. Amos was also the spokesman of the people. He voiced their revolt against the injustice under which they groaned. Of primary importance, however, was his witness to One whom Israel had forsaken—forsaken in spite of her ritual observances. That was Jehovah, the God of her fathers.

Engaged on a quest like this, could Amos hope to succeed? The prejudice of a worldly laity and a corrupt clergy was arrayed against him. They combined forces to discredit the prophet and to stifle his testimony. Amaziah, the priest, ordered him back to his own land. "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel, for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." It was immaterial to them that Amos was sent of God. They denied his right to preach unpalatable truths to those who were enjoying the pleasant things

of life. His reply, keen as the winds upon the uplands, smote Amaziah like a lash. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, 'Go, prophesy unto my people, Israel. Now, therefore, hear thou the word of the Lord.' "

Even when Amos retired from the scene of his daring attack on that citadel of hypocrisy, he had not spoken his last word. Tradition has it that subsequently he fell a victim to foul play, in which Amaziah and his sons were implicated. By that time, however, Amos had written his discourses, and in that way, banned though they probably were, they were conveyed to the people whom God would fain save from their stupid folly.

This prophet has a counterpart in that stalwart figure in fiction, John Storm, in Hall Caine's *The Christian*. He was a young clergyman who, after his ordination, was appointed to a fashionable parish in London. His chief, a popular and successful preacher, was a man of the world, as well as a professed man of God. His eyes were continually on the main chance. He understood what the people desired him to preach, so he spoke smooth things to the elect, for the elect were also the élite.

Storm's first service resulted in disillusionment. He felt the hollowness and pretence about him. Although he was not permitted to occupy this cultured

pulpit on Sunday, when the well-dressed congregation languidly waited upon the rector's ministrations, a Wednesday evening was assigned to him. His hearers then were not imposing either in numbers or social status, but undeterred he took his text, "My kingdom is not of this world." His voice sounded thin and weak, echoing in the empty church. He described how the world was filled with discord. Men were fighting and devouring one another. "Cheat or be cheated" was their rule of life. While some were living lives of frivolity and sin, taking pleasure in the desires of the flesh, others were grovelling in the mire or else dying of want.

The sermon was not acceptable. In due course, he was taken to task by the incumbent, and lofty counsel mingled with stern reproof. It was impossible, the rector urged, to apply to this century, with its changed conditions, the rules of conduct that had been proper to the first. Then, as the months passed, further acquaintance with the life about him convinced Storm that something was sadly amiss, either with himself or with the world. He walked the squares of that opulent quarter, noting the sad spectacle of careless manhood and shameless womanhood. His soul was ablaze with wrath, and still moved to pity. He was consciously out of his element. For the rector to condone outrageous sins, to refuse to speak the truth because his congregation was rich and of high position, made the man contemptible. So there

was only one course open to Storm. He tendered his resignation.

The final interview with the rector was acrimonious. "In giving up my curacy," said Storm, "I am not leaving the Church of England. I am leaving only you. . . . I am leaving you because the atmosphere you breathe is impossible to me. Your religion is not my religion, nor your God my God. . . . A month ago I asked you to set your face, as a clergyman, against the shameful and immoral marriage of a man of scandalous reputation, but you refused; you excused the man and sided with him. This morning you thought it necessary to investigate in public the case of one of this man's victims, and you sided with the man again—you denied the girl the right even to mention the scoundrel's name. You called that poor child a prostitute because she had wasted the good gifts which God had given her. But God has given good gifts to you also—gifts of intellect and eloquence with which you might have raised the fallen and supported the weak, and defended the downtrodden and comforted the broken-hearted—and what have you done with them? You have bartered them for benefices, and peddled them for popularity; you have given them in exchange for money, for houses, for furniture, for things like this—and this—and this! You have sold your birthright for a mess of pottage, and therefore you are the prostitute! Yes, ten thousand times more the

prostitute than that poor fallen girl with her taint of blood and will! There would be no such women as she is to fall victims to evil companionship if there were no such men as you are to excuse their betrayers and to side with them. Who is more the prostitute—the woman who sells her body, or the man who sells his soul? You are the worst prostitute on the streets of London, and yet you are in the Church, in the pulpit, and you call yourself a follower of the One who forgave the woman and shamed the hypocrites, and had not where to lay His head!"

Neither John Storm nor Amos, outspoken and fearless, could hope to be a success. But there is something better than what the world proffers. It may be high failure such as that which Amos reached. His words had a stern ring because he felt so deeply the wrongs to be righted. And still, if we listen intently, there are sympathetic tones, in which echoed the tenderness of God for the erring. There is genius in every line of his message. Where did he obtain his skill? With David, under the same starry skies, or beneath the waving boughs of the sycamores? We hazard an answer. It was while he pursued his daily toil, caring for his sheep. The burning intensity of the prophet was due to his deep sense of God. His convictions were based on his concept of the Eternal majesty. Jehovah was not only supreme, but also holy in character. There was nothing variable or vindictive in the divine nature. He might

permit evil to happen. To the self-deluded religionists, it might appear that they could safely take their own course provided that ceremonial observances were duly regarded. Was that really the case? Was that all that was required of those who were bound by a covenant to the Almighty? That compact implied loving obedience on the part of the people, as it revealed a unique purpose on the part of God. But while the bond had been honoured by Him, it had been lightly esteemed and even ignored by Israel when circumstances demanded it. Privilege carried with it responsibility. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

This was a revolutionary idea to the Hebrew of that time. He looked on the God of his fathers as responsible for the safety and welfare of those who confided in Him. We have a hint of that false security into which they had been lulled by their leaders. Their confidence in the Day of the Lord was that it would be a day of retribution for their enemies, irrespective of their own moral obligations. And to belittle the formal worship of Bethel as Amos did, aroused the fiercest resentment. "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them."[4]

This anticipates the emphasis which Christ put on

obedience rather than sacrifice. Man can offer nothing to God in place of a contrite and loving heart. Sweeter than the music of his viols, is "a life that leads melodious days." What oblations could Israel offer to compare with that? Thus Amos enjoined them to "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Blessings could not be bought. God was not to be bribed. It was true that He delighted in the thankfulness which discerned the Giver in the gift. But He who had guided the fortunes of the nation, who had been the strong refuge of their fathers through the desert years and subsequent trials, desired more than perfunctory worship that had no heart-devotion accompanying it. The Holy One could not be flouted with impunity. How could He demand righteousness from the heathen without asking even more from those who had enjoyed the rich opportunities of Israel?

The book of Amos comprises three sections. Chapters I and II contain a tactful reference to the wrongdoing of the alien kingdoms. This would receive Israel's unqualified approval, for, naturally, their enemies were altogether wicked! There had been tyranny, and shameful disregard of the rights of others. Was it not just, therefore, that such nations should be punished? In this, Amos would command ready assent. From that, however, he argues that Israel shall be judged in the same manner for her chances had been greater.

In the second section, Chapters III–VI, are three discourses based on that admission. Israel is not a favourite of Jehovah. Because she had been Jehovah's choice, more would be expected of her. But what was the position? Samaria had become a by-word among the nations because of her declension. Self-indulgence had displaced holiness of life. The sanctuary was profaned by pretence. Sacrifice, intended to be simply a symbol, had become a substitute for upright dealing and faithful living. Even the lessons of adversity had failed to teach Israel that. Famine and drought, blast, pestilence and destruction, had been endured, but without any repentance on the part of the people, or any abandonment of their evil ways. And now that blessing was again theirs, did it mean that God had been cajoled or placated by some base means? That could not be! With trumpet-voice, Amos called the nation to prepare to meet its God. He contrasts their puny ideas of Him with the majesty of the divine presence revealed to him in his former retreat. "Lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of Hosts, is His name." The grounds of judgment are repeated. The vain talk about "the day of the Lord," emanating from those who lay on beds of ivory, and basked in the light of a false security, is shown to be foolish.

Disaster was inevitable. Their disregard of God and His covenant had been too flagrant and long-continued for punishment now to be averted.

The third section, covering Chapters VII to IX, contains five visions by which the truth had been presented to the prophet's mind. A plague of locusts had stripped the country-side. Then fire was seen, raging with devastating fury over the land, and touching even the sea. Both suggest the loss sin brings to mankind. The plumb-line showed how the social fabric was built without regard to the stable principles of rectitude and integrity. A basket of summer fruit, suggested the rottenness and decay everywhere prevalent. The picture of the Lord standing at the altar spoke of the all-seeing Deity who, refusing to tolerate desecration and subterfuge, would separate the false from the true, the counterfeit from the genuine. The poet asks:

> "Have ye founded your thrones and altars, then,
> On the bodies and souls of living men?
> And think ye that building shall endure,
> Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor?"

The prophecy, however, culminates in a joyous hope of restoration. There shall be a remnant composed of the contrite and sincere. Blessing shall follow as the day the night, and a redeemed Israel shall be established.

Amos reaches a high level of eloquence. His

exalted views are expressed in fresh and arrestive language. His numerous references to the natural world spring from his life under the widespreading skies. The tempest and whirlwind, the locust and drought, the lion roaring in the forest, the striking metaphor of the thrashing instruments of iron, the height of the cedars and the strength of the oaks, all proclaim that. The remains of a sheep snatched from a lion, the bird in the snare, the cart laden with sheaves at harvest-time, are from the same source. The clash of armed men had also penetrated his distant dwelling, for we hear the sound of the trumpet, the whirring flight of arrows, and the pounding of maddened hoofs as a routed foe tries to escape. Amos's appeal to the nation to seek God aright, on the other hand, ranks with anything found within the pages of the Old Testament. "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek Him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the Lord is His name; that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress."

This is a man who compels admiration. He was mastered by God's Spirit, until enthusiasm for the right burned in his soul with an unquenchable flame.

His convictions were matched by his courage. His personal character may be illustrated, perhaps, by referring to a map of Russia. If we look for the two cities of Leningrad and Moscow, and trace the railroad that joins them, we find that it runs absolutely straight, without the windings which often occur. The explanation is interesting, especially considering the natural obstacles to be overcome. When the project was first discussed, the chief construction engineer submitted his plans to the then Czar. He asked the direction his Majesty wished the road to take. A map was laid before him, and taking a ruler, the Czar drew a line between the two cities. "That is the way I want it to run—straight, like that." And it did.

Amos was as straight as a die. He had orders from the Almighty, and without fearing the face of man, he set himself as a flint against all his antagonists. Even those who were steeped in self-satisfaction or profligacy were conscious of his magnetic spell, while others were thrilled and captivated by his sincerity. Amos is a striking example of men who have left their mark on the world by their inflexible purpose and honesty of aim. Peter, the Hermit, consumed with a desire to see the Holy Land freed from the Turk, swept Europe like a prairie conflagration. The XIth century was not unduly impressionable. But the cold and sluggish, no less than those of finer spirit, were moved by the

man's earnestness. They caught his vision, and through his advocacy, the first Crusade to conquer Jerusalem was undertaken. Savonarola was a man of a similar nature. Like the Vesuvius of his native land, the fiery lava of his preaching carried all before it. The abuses of the church, the worldliness of the clergy, and the shallowness of the professedly pious, were destroyed. For three years, his rule in Florence was undisputed. Reform after reform was put into effect until it appeared as though he would transform society. But, as Jesus taught, a man's foes were those of his own household, and he fell victim to the pent-up hatred of ecclesiasticism. Wesley, travelling on horseback through the length and breadth of England, speaking in churches or in the open air, brought the nation to its knees. And George Whitefield moved the manhood of both sides of the Atlantic as few others have done.

John Knox, in a period full of grave difficulties, is another instance. Mary, Queen of Scots, summoned him to Holyrood, but instead of the platitudes and sycophancy to which she was accustomed, Knox spoke in no measured terms of what lay on his conscience. The queen's callous behaviour and her disregard of sacred principles, called forth stern admonishment. So plots were laid against him. The net of High Treason was warily set for his feet. Yet that man of iron will and unconquerable faith maintained his witness. St. Giles' Cathedral was more

than his pulpit; it was his throne. Assured that no harm could befall God's ambassador, he remained steadfast despite the threatenings of his opponents. Spurgeon and Parker, Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks, stand in the same line of prophetic descent. And time will never fully disclose the extent of their influence or the magnitude of their achievements.

We find in Amos that stimulating belief in Jehovah's fidelity which brought cheer to those who sought to do right. There was nothing his day needed more. We need it still. Behind all time's changes and vicissitudes, the unalterable purpose of God stands supreme. Like a wise parent who may sometimes leave quarrelsome children to settle their disputes in their own way, God does not constantly intervene. He has made man free. And when he, using that freedom in the right way, chooses the good, untold blessing follows. The reverse is also true. Let freedom be misused, let man in his folly wander from the right like a senseless sheep, and the consequences of his waywardness must be faced. The heavenly Shepherd has not ceased to care, nor even ceased to seek. But man cannot be made righteous against his will. Amos drew on his practical experience with his flock to illumine this fact. As a shepherd he had come to assure the lost sheep of Israel that God longed for their highest good. Mingling with the careless throngs of Samaria, the herdsman of

Tekoa was God's pledge of concern and tender regard. He was calling the lost to Himself!

A pilgrim, of whom we read, was on a long and dangerous journey over a mountain range, and inquired of another traveller about the way. The road was pointed out to him, together with the perilous places of which he must beware. The pilgrim observed all this attentively; but, as he journeyed, the rocks grew steeper, and the path seemed to lose itself in the dreary ravines. His courage failed. Anxiously looking up to the towering crags, he cried, "It is impossible for man to ascend so steep a track, and to climb these forbidding rocks. The wings of eagles, and the feet of the mountain-goat, alone could do it." He had almost resolved to retrace his steps, when a voice exclaimed, "Take heart, and follow me!" He looked around, and beheld the man whom he had previously encountered. He saw him move steadily upwards, past boulders and roaring torrents, skirting hazardous cliffs, and climbing ever higher. This inspired the pilgrim with new resolve, and he followed bravely. Before nightfall, they had scaled the peak. A lovely valley, where blossomed myrtle and pomegranate-trees, greeted them. Turning to his guide, the first said, "How can I express my thanks to thee? Thou hast not only led me on the right way, but hast also given me strength to persevere." The other answered, "Not so: am I not a wanderer like thyself; and art thou not the same

man as before? Thou hast merely seen by my example what thou art, and what thou art able to do."

We need the word of exhortation, lest under the strain of daily life, we lose our glimpse of the eternal splendour, or discount the effectual help of God. All we have attained or received must be traced to Him. The good we enjoy carries with it a corresponding claim on us to be true to the highest. But there is also the reassuring thought of Amos; that, come what may, God still holds sovereign sway. The world with its towering mountains and rolling seas, its pageantry of star-studded skies, of seed-time and harvest, of the marvels of the universe, all speak of the Omnipotent God. But with all its sins and shortcomings, the race is still dear to the Father of mankind. It has been redeemed by the sacrifice of His Only-begotten Son. Its misdeeds and mistakes, its strivings and service, are known to Him. So through good report and ill, we may endure as seeing Him who is invisible, for God is unfailing in His love. The positive note with which Amos concludes is abundantly justified by the Christian revelation.

". . . . Faith cannot be unanswered;
Her feet are firmly planted on the rock;
Amid the wildest storms she stands undaunted,
Nor quails before the loudest thunder-shock.
She knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,
And cried, 'It shall be done,' some time, somewhere."

After exile comes home; after the gloom, the gleam. And life's travail shall culminate in the realized blessedness brought within human reach by Christ, the Lord.

## HOSEA, THE MAN OF THE SHATTERED ROMANCE

Lived in Israel, during the time of Jeroboam II., Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, and Pekahiah.

The Fall of Samaria brought the kingdom of Israel to an end, and the Ten Tribes lost their identity—B.C. 722.
Hosea's period, B.C. 743–738

## *IV. HOSEA*

"The worst of having a romance of any kind," says the author of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "is that it leaves one so unromantic." That may be true. Yet although the romance of Hosea's life was shattered, he remains a fascinating figure. Unlike Amos, he belonged to the Northern Kingdom, still under the rule of Jeroboam II. His work probably extended from B.C. 743 to B.C. 738, for he began to prophesy a few years after Amos had visited Bethel, and continued after Menahem, the vassal of Tiglath-Pileser, was on the throne. It is plain that Hosea had meditated much on those evils that had corroded the life of the nation. The herdsman had stirred his repugnance at the superficiality and idolatry of his people, and Hosea is led along the trail so well blazed by Amos. The profanation of God's altar, and the outrageous conduct of the priesthood, were an offence to his soul. He is filled with wonder at the patience of Jehovah, for if mortal man felt the iniquities of the time, how much more must the heavenly Father? Judgment would be meted out. The scourge was merited. None dare dispute that. And only by the mercy of God, Hosea believed, could Israel be saved from extinction.

So much for a general statement of Hosea's position. What of the man himself? It has been suggested that he belonged to the priesthood. The grounds for this are his references to the abominations and abuses that defiled both the sanctuary and those who ministered there. We have, however, sufficient evidence to support the idea that he was a man of enough education and insight to gauge these things from the outside. He had a mind susceptible to beauty. That can be seen from the allusions he makes to Nature. He speaks of the morning cloud and the early dew, the swelling streams, and the hot winds of the desert that dry up the fountains and shrivel the vegetation. He hears the roaring of wild beasts in the forest. The lion, panther, and bear, together with the wild ass, appear in his pages. Agriculture also yields him some striking illustrations. There are the stubborn cattle, and those who bear the yoke; the operations of ploughing, and harrowing, of sowing, reaping, and thrashing. While his mention of the vine and fig-tree, the flowers and nettles, the thorn and thistles, denote an observant mind. But that very faculty for appreciating the beautiful made him keenly sensitive to that which was unlovely, especially in human life. That was why he rose in revolt against the hypocrisy and pitiless oppression of his day. How came he, however, to frame his message in the way he did? It deals with a ruined home and a ruined race. We turn to

an earlier phase of his personal life, with the awakening of romance.

Hosea had made the acquaintance of a woman of his people, named Gomer-bath-Diblaim. It may be that he knew little of either her history or her character, but he was not unduly concerned about that. She was fair to look upon. Her sparkling eyes and entrancing smiles were ever in his thoughts. Love had come! And when, greatly daring, he asked her to share his lot, and found that his affection was reciprocated, his cup was full to overflowing. The vision of the home to be flooded his soul like sunshine. A new incentive throbbed in his breast. He began to strive and save as never before. With new-found ardour, he gave himself to his work so that even his employer wondered. Duties which formerly were discharged mechanically, were now invested with new meaning. He had done them before as though conferring a favour; now he could not do enough. And were it not that he looked forward with such anticipation to the evening hour, when he might walk with Gomer through the meadows, he would have been willing to toil on long after the appointed time. If, now and then, a far-away look stole into his eyes, and efforts relaxed, it was only for a few moments. He compensated for that by increased energy. And his master had sufficient acquaintance with the ways of youth to know what it implied. One day the secret came out. In reply to a discreet question, Hosea

admitted the reason for the change that had come over him—a home was in the making.

All this, of course, would be too sacred for Hosea to set down, even had he considered that others might be interested in his romance. So he does not mention the stir his nuptials made in the tiny town, nor the rosy skies outspread like a canopy as Gomer and he began the path together. But as time went on, the fact could not be concealed that the marriage had not turned out happily. He was elated by the coming of his children, for two sons and a daughter were born to him. Under some strange impulse, he gave them symbolic names. Jezreel, his first-born, signified "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." Lo-ruhamah, his daughter's name, meant, "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel." The third, Lo-ammi, implied, "Ye are not My people, and I will not be your God." That shows how, in spite of his own affairs that were now causing him some uneasiness, Hosea was dwelling on the times in which he lived.

Then tragedy came. He had been married only a few years, when he discovered Gomer's real character. The correct interpretation of the passage here is, not that God directed him to marry a woman of loose morals, but that after they were united he found that she was unworthy of his trust. One evening, he came back from his labours to find the children sitting disconsolately by the door, tired and hungry. The

house had the deserted look that is always noticeable when the mother is absent. The fire was out. The pot which should have contained the steaming broth hung by the cold hearth. Weary though he was, he set about preparing a meal for the three little ones. As he pursues his task, we see plainly that he is unskilled in the art. He does not know where anything is kept; he litters up the room in his operations. But eventually, after long and blundering effort, the children are pacified, and he hurries them to bed.

It is only then that he has time to think. Sick at heart, he cannot touch the food he has cooked. What can all this mean? As he sits there brooding over the situation, suspicions that before he had driven from him with loathing came back like mocking spectres. The objections he had made to Gomer regarding her associates, half-banteringly and with a touch of self-reproach, were evidently justified. He had never really thought any serious harm could come of her gay disposition and her love of society. And now . . . ? A hand is on the latch! Perhaps she has returned? No; it is a neighbour who has come, as some people revel in doing, to pass on the gossip current in the village. Gomer had been seen leaving that day with a companion, bearing a bulky package. When asked if she were going on a journey, she had laughed brazenly, and without satisfying the curious, had left the question unanswered. Then with an unfeeling jest about the man she had vowed to love,

but whom she had duped, she bade them tell Hosea that she had done with him and mediocrity. Born for ease and luxury, for pleasure and position, these were hers for the asking. And barbing her shaft with a sacred phrase, she had glibly cried, "And the place thereof shall know me no more!"

Hosea is now like a man who, conversant with the facts before he is told, is yet staggered when the news is callously put into words. Begging the neighbour to leave him to himself, he sits by the smouldering fire. It was emblematic of his own life. The gleam of tender affection which had lit up that house, throwing playful shadows on the wall, had gone; only grey ashes and a few embers remained. This was the end of all his hopes! Home's roof-tree rests transversely on the woman and the man. Take either away, and it will collapse unless faith in God is there to support the other end. Or, as Longfellow puts it,

> "As unto the bow the cord is,
> So unto the man is woman,
> Though she bends him, she obeys him,
> Though she draws him, yet she follows,
> Useless each without the other."

Of course, there were still the children to think about. Although he treasured their trustful love, their very innocency and helplessness rendered his loss the more poignant. What would become of them? When they asked for their mother, as they would on the morrow, how could he keep the truth from them?

The Hon. John Collier's famous canvas, "A Fallen Idol," might well have been inspired by Hosea. There we see a man looking with fixed eyes into the open grate. His hands are clasped between his knees. The face is ashen, while the deep lines, carved by agony of mind, cannot be missed. Crouching at his feet is a woman in evening dress. It is his wife. He has, perchance, taxed her with some rumours going the rounds. At first she indignantly denied his accusation; then, aware of the proofs in his possession, but goaded by the voice of conscience, she has poured out her tearful confession. It is not merely the enormity of her sin, much though the husband feels it. It is not that his name has been besmirched in her hands. It is rather that one whom he revered, who stood as the embodiment of purity, uprightness, and womanly sweetness, has been pushed from her pedestal and broken by the fall. Disillusionment? It was irreparable disaster! He is willing to forgive, but to forget . . . ? And Hosea's lot was even more terrible. His was a faithless wife and a lost ideal. But there was not even the grace of penitence or the desire to reform to mitigate Gomer's wrongdoing.

How long he sat there, the stricken man did not know. Love yields the sweetest joy on earth and also the most profound sorrow. The shattered cruse of romance may retain some of its fragrance, but its sharp edges cut to the quick. As the sun's rays

filtered through the chinks of the shutters, he rose to his feet. He was stiff and cold. But the dull pain of Gomer's treachery nothing could relieve. Mechanically opening the casement, he lifted his grief-marked face to the hopeless dawn. Then a truth of tremendous import flashed upon him. Was not the human husband a counterpart of the divine Husband? What Gomer had been to Hosea, Israel had been to Jehovah! Both had entered into a holy compact, and of that happy union, joy and peace had been born. But then, the wrong Gomer had inflicted on him, had also been committed by Israel against God. The unfaithful wife was a type of the erring and faithless nation which had chosen another in place of Him who had been both protector and provider. And again, what the human heart felt in its outraged esteem, its sense of desolating separation, God must feel in an infinite degree. The waywardness of the beloved stabs the faithful like an assassin in the dark. It is true of man's love; how much more true of God's!

Such was the revelation that came to Hosea. By the wreck of his own home, he interpreted the ruin of his nation. The divine Spirit impelled him to bear the tidings afield. Then making arrangements for the care of his children, he loosened the ties holding him back from acquiescence. He went out to speak to Israel from the fulness of his own sufferings. Some might resent it that one on whose family life a dark

blot rested should assume the rôle of a moral counsellor, but they could not silence him. On the contrary, because he had sorrowed, and therefore could speak from experience, his words would have the greater urgency. Israel had been, as it were, married to Jehovah. The Covenant ratified by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, had however, been set at nought. Untrue to its vows, like an errant wife, the nation had laid its love at the shrine of sin. Baal had displaced God in her affections.

The hostility of the priesthood made Hosea's task more difficult. Unlike Amos, when the situation became acute, he could not retire to a distant retreat. He was there among his own people, to find every man's hand against him because he had dared to be true to his God. Yet his complaints are seen to be well-founded when we look at the events following Jeroboam's death. It was a period of unsettlement and consequent distress. Zechariah who succeeded his father, became the victim of a conspiracy, and was foully murdered by Shallum. The new king, had been on the throne just a month when a military plot, headed by Menaham, a scheming and unscrupulous general, culminated in the death of Shallum. Menaham took the reins himself. He was merely a puppet in the hands of Assyria, keeping his crown by her aid, and Israel sank ignominiously in the scale. As though this were not enough, wickedness became rampant in the land. With the sanction of the rulers, justice

was perverted. The social ills against which Amos had fulminated still prevailed. But instead of seeking to remedy this state of affairs, the priesthood gave the lead in violence and lawlessness. Hosea fearlessly accused them of this. "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent." Moreover, religion was polluted with excess and idolatrous rites. While Amos had contemptuously ignored the bull-worship, the form by which Jehovah was served, Hosea was revolted by it. There could be no half-measures for him haunted by the memories of his own tragic past. Bethel, "the house of God," had degenerated into Beth-aven, "The house of vanity." Whence had come their blessings, their prosperity, their treasured possessions? What had made the kingdom great: was it these false gods or Jehovah? Scandalous ingratitude, like that of King Lear's daughters, brought deep wounds to the heavenly Lover. It must also be productive of wretchedness in the sinner's case. Remorse would follow this national unchastity. Like a recreant wife, who had turned her back on love and children, Israel would yet long for what she had discarded so thoughtlessly. She would seek in vain for the peace and happiness bartered for some proffered boon, only to be mocked by the fickle admirer to whom she had fled. While the prophet enlarges on the guilt of the people, and then stigmatizes the iniquity of both them and their leaders, resentment is uppermost

within him. There is also the stinging shame of one who feels how hateful such base desertion must ever be.

Then the tone changes. The tear-stained face of Gomer looms before Hosea's eyes. If not more to be pitied than blamed, at least she was to be pitied! After all,

> "Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove:
> Oh, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken."

Perhaps to his own astonishment, when the first shock of grief had passed, Hosea discovered that he still loved his wanton wife. In fact, his affection was, if anything, deeper than before.

While Amos, with his stern visage, his harsh censure and stinging invective, may resemble John the Baptist, whom does Hosea suggest? His grief, his compassion, his scorned yet suppliant love, fine as they were, are but a dim shadow of Christ's. Jesus saw, as none other ever did, how the human heart had strayed from its holy Lover. He saw how fair and specious, but how false, the promises that, luring it from its allegiance, had left it bemired by life's way. Shame, hopelessness, and unavailing regrets, like a barrage of fire, kept it from reconciliation. His sympathy is displayed in companying with the outcasts of His day. Their coarse humour and vile habits

repelled His pure soul; their plight drew Him instinctively to their side. He yearned over those women and men who, cut off from the influences that keep life pure and sound, hung on the edge of the abyss. His first object in showing them friendship was to break down the hindrances to reclamation. He strove to make them feel that, not only did He believe in them, but also that God longed for them as a father for the prodigal.

In part Jesus succeeded. But as fully as He desired? We think not. To the end of His earthly life, He went on with a burdened heart. God had been deserted by the sinner, and in place of love, had come infatuation ending in tears and self-reproach. Instead of satisfaction, there was satiation. Christ's last week in Jerusalem marked how the waters of grief steadily rose in His breast. He had pleaded, but His entreaties were in vain. He had pilloried sin, but the sinner's resistance was stiffened. He had spoken of the unfailing mercy of God, but that had met with but slight response. In the quiet of the evening, Jesus climbed the hillside overlooking the populous city. The setting sun spread a mantle of calm over the landscape. And as He looked at the dazzling sight of the temple, gilded and burnished with aureate glory, and at the clustering homes of the people, His feelings must have been something akin to those of Wordsworth as he contemplated London from Westminster Bridge:

"Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty. . . .
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

Or, again, take that description of the ancient city of Heidelberg, which even the best-informed would have difficulty in tracing as to its authorship. It is from Mark Twain. He says: "I got up and went into the west balcony, and saw a wonderful sight. Away down on the level, under the black mass of the Castle, the town lay, stretched along the river, its intricate cobweb of streets jewelled with twinkling lights; there were rows of lights on the bridges: these flung lances of light upon the water, in the black shadows of the arches: and away at the extremity of all this fairy spectacle blinked and glowed a massed multitude of gas jets which seemed to cover acres of ground: it was as if all the diamonds in the world had been spread out there. I did not know before that a half mile of sextuple railway tracks could be made such an adornment. . . . A fallen Milky Way with that glittering railway constellation pinned to the border."

Christ's gaze, however, penetrated the roofs of Jerusalem, and read the hidden secrets beneath them. He saw persistent wrong-doing and crass perversity. There were hearts bereft of peace, and sorrows which must remain unassuaged. Then His

godlike tenderness welled up till the eyes filled with scalding tears. The voice is choked with emotion as He says: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thy eyes." If the wistful pleadings of Hosea be likened to the moaning of the sea which the child fancies he hears in the shell, if they are echoes of the mighty love of God, then Christ's compassion is as the ocean itself, measureless and vast. And can He who wept over Jerusalem look on the transgressions and tragedies of the modern world without a pang?

We saw in our dream that One like unto the Son of man stood in the city where men meet to transact their business. Great was the power for good or evil wielded by them, and some knew it full well. One paused in the way, perplexity written large on his face. And over against him, unperceived by the passers-by, was the Saviour. The merchant reasoned thus with himself. "Why should I not? Others would: no question of principle would weigh with them. Even though it may ruin another, it is all in a day's work. It does not pay to be too particular! 'Needs must when the devil drives.'" The Divine Face was clouded as He said to the defeated one "If thou hadst known. . . ."

He stood beside a maiden, though she saw Him not. Had she detected His presence, she would not have spoken her thoughts as she compared two

portraits. "After all, romance is not everything. They talk of love in a cottage, and say that richer is she who possesses love than those who have luxury and wealth without it. Yet one cannot live on sentiment! This boy has ambitions, I know, but so have plenty of other men. He has his castles in the air; I want one on earth. And that other has everything I desire, even though he is not fit to hold a candle to the first. I almost despise him, but he has made his way. He has position and money, and—but then, one cannot have everything in this world." She slowly tore one photograph across, saying, "Well, I shall say 'Yes.' I hate to hurt him but what can one do?" And with a sigh the unseen Listener whispered, "If thou hadst known. . . ."

A group of men sat in solemn conclave about a council table. They were all manifestly men of position, for while a few wore showy uniforms, the others were in the immaculate dress of the statesman. They were so engrossed with the maps and documents before them, that they did not notice the silent Presence. "It resolves itself into this," said one, on whose breast gleamed orders galore. "Either we permit mere humanitarian considerations to step in, or we abandon the plans of a lifetime. The latter, I for one am not prepared to do. The Sermon on the Mount? What has that to do with it? If we do not pursue this course, some other nation will!"

It was the same everywhere. Men took the line

of least resistance, without thinking of the grief caused to the eternal Father. They oppressed the weak, or snatched with the cruel hand of supposed necessity what belonged to others, forgetful of One who sympathizes both with the sinner and the sinned against, and who also feels most the wrongs of "Man's inhumanity to man."

Thus, in our dream, we followed that solitary Figure, walking the pavements of the city. He met the tired toiler as One who had Himself laboured, and knew the weariness of the working-day. He looked into the painted face of pleasure, and the deep-lined face of care, as though sorrowing for both, though in diverse ways. Then as, at length, we lost sight of Him in the centres where squalor and misery reign with undisputed sway, the unutterable pity of God fell on our spirit like the soft-shed dews of evening.

It was Hosea's privilege to interpret the Eternal in the selfless endeavour of forgiving love. What God would fain do for Israel, the prophet must do for his wayward wife. The strength of an undying passion pulsates in the words: "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." So he goes in quest of the fallen one, with a love unwearying, because so pure and faithful. After long seeking, he discovers Gomer sunk in the pit of degradation. She has become a slave, bought for some sordid purpose. Were he

compelled to beggar himself, that mattered nothing if only he could save her from her sin and from herself. The scene leaps before the mind. This heart-broken husband, though the old wounds are reopened at the pathetic figure of his wife, begins the abhorrent bargaining with the man to whom Gomer belongs. Hosea shrinks from divulging his relationship with her. So he must perforce listen to a recital of her qualities and charms.

Then, with the object of adding keenness to the discussion, the vendor suggests another maiden that may perhaps suit the fancy of the would-be purchaser better. But finding that the man is firm, he comes back to the original proposal, and with loathsome familiarity, calls attention to the various good points the woman possesses. Gomer's downcast eyes do not see Hosea at first, or else his averted face prevents recognition, but suddenly she hears his voice—and knows him. For a moment, the dealer has left them together. In a tempest of tears, she prostrates herself at Hosea's feet, lifting his robe to her lips, and imploring his mercy. Is it to wreak revenge on her that he has thus tracked her down? Would God she had died before her hiding-place had been discovered!

Suppressing his emotion, his yearning to lift her up and enfold her in his arms, lest the price be raised beyond his ability to pay, he speedily completes the transaction. The money changes hands. And Gomer

is free—free to be enslaved by the ties of warmest love, pure as a mountain spring.

In *The Idylls of the King*, Tennyson tells the story of Queen Guinevere. She had sinned against the honour of her lord, but King Arthur traced her to the holy house of Malmesbury, where she had fled to find repentance and pardon. With appealing hands outstretched, and in faltering tones, he says:

"Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet. . . .
My doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We too may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband."

If the poet conveys but a part of the truth, then let the artist make the abstract concrete; let him humanize the divine and thus bring it definitely within the compass of the mind. In a picture by Rossetti, entitled "Found," we gain what we are seeking. A country man and a village maiden have plighted their simple troth, in their early days, but she has been lured from the sleepy town by the echoing music and flaunting lights of the city. The man visits

London, twice a week, to market his produce, but he spares a few hours between times to search the thronging thoroughfares, much as Dan'l Peggotty sought for little Em'ly, in the hope that he might find her whom he loved. He is crossing Blackfriars Bridge when he catches sight of a woman in showy attire approaching from the opposite direction. They meet. Perhaps she recognized his rustic garb before he saw her, but he has grasped her wrist before she can pass, and now they look into each other's faces. One is marked by disgrace, the other by warm sympathy and fadeless love. Is it not a parable of the soul and its Maker?

With greater longing and at incalculable cost, did God seek and save His people. "I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness!" sang the voice of ransoming devotion. It brought joy to Gomer. It meant deliverance also to the righteous remnant of Israel. It still rings with richer harmonies from Calvary's cross. Well may we affirm that in the shattered romance of Hosea we see the havoc sin has wrought. But it is equally true that, in the reunion that redemptive sacrifice has procured, there is that glorious hope by which a sinful and estranged race may be won back to purity, happiness, and peace, through Christ's triumphant grace.

## ISAIAH, PRINCE, PATRIOT, PROPHET

Related to the royal house of Judah, he prophesied from the death of King Uzziah, B.C. 740, through the reigns of:

Jotham,
Ahaz,
Hezekiah,

kings of Judah.

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## *V. ISAIAH*

Affliction knows no boundaries. It can scale the gleaming battlements of a palace, and outwit the most vigilant bodyguard, as readily as it enters the peasant's cottage. Neither regal power nor splendid state can affright it. It stalks across tessellated pavements and carpeted floors as well as over bare boards. Isaiah pondered the fact. To him it was grievous indeed. It was not that he felt a king should be immune from the disabilities to which mankind is heir; it was rather that one so needed by his country as King Uzziah was, should be thus stricken. Uzziah was a leper! Banished from his own court, his steadying hand had been taken from the tiller. His sway was abrogated by the stern voice of circumstance. He was no longer a ruler, but one ruled by the hand of destiny.

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was most likely a nephew of Amaziah, the king's father. He would, therefore, be a cousin of Uzziah, and as a prince of Judah, would be thrown into intimate contact with the king. He knew something of the monarch's unrealized ambitions, his plans for the country's good, his hopes of placing the realm on a sound footing. Yet all this was not to be!

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

The end came. Uzziah died without being able to carry out, even through his counsellors, those schemes he had cherished. During the early part of his reign the country had developed to such an extent that it is not too much to say that it had reached the zenith of prosperity. He built a chain of forts to protect the land against Philistine aggression from the west. He reorganized his army. Jerusalem was beautified and its fortifications strengthened. The standard of living in the capital was higher than it had ever been, and comfort passed to luxury. Had it not been for the malady which marred his life, the history of Judah might have been far different.

Beyond a period of formal mourning for the late king, the nation seemed unaffected. Jotham, who had been acting as regent, took the crown, and Isaiah was sad indeed. There were chicanery and plotting within the court circles. There was a total disregard of Jehovah without. The whole land, to the already burdened soul of Isaiah, seemed to be given over to excess and lawlessness. The strong preyed on the weak. The rich wasted their strength and misused their resources for vain show and abominable indulgences. There was corruption in high places, and justice had become a marketable commodity. Sensuous idolatry had been openly countenanced by

those to whom the oracles of God had been committed. Was it any wonder then, that this man felt depressed? He was a prince; he was also a patriot.

"Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
'This is my own, my native land!'
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
As home his footsteps he hath turned,
From wandering on a foreign strand?
If such there breathe, go—mark him well;
For him no minstrel-raptures swell. . . .
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung!"

That Isaiah loved his country may be judged from his frequent allusions to its capital, its people, and its sacred places. Jerusalem was dear to his heart. The beauty of its architecture, the commanding site it occupied, are ever in his thoughts. He sees the envoys of other monarchs coming to pay their respects to his master. A stream of wealth flows up the long gorges and through its gates. High over the homes of the people stand the massive buildings of the Temple, where at stated seasons the exuberant voices of pilgrims from afar could be heard. And still this country, so abundantly blessed by Jehovah, and enriched with inspiring memories of the past, was given over to worldliness and materialism. The

prophet had expected so much of Uzziah. They had discussed together the needs of the body politic, and those ideals that should be enthroned in the people's breasts. There were reforms for which, even if the hour were not ripe, the best minds of Judah were ardently working. With a firm resolve, supported by the loyal co-operation of his court, nothing seemed inaccessible to a sovereign who dared to be true to Jehovah.

But now, Uzziah was dead! And hope died with him. With all his limitations, he had been better than many of the royal line. Doubtless, he had made mistakes, and had stumbled in the way of righteousness. His noble nature was, however, thrown into high relief in comparison with his son, Jotham. The new ruler quickly gave proof that he was unlikely to be actuated by any higher motive than expediency. He would not easily subordinate his imperious will to that of Jehovah. Thus melancholy wrapped Isaiah about, like a mountain clothed with mist.

Troubles even when they are trivial in themselves, may have far-reaching effects. Blaise Pascal points out that had Cleopatra been less beautiful than she was, the course of the world's history might have been otherwise. Pope Adrian was choked by a small insect, but his death changed the policy of his times. That renowned singer of ancient Greece, Anacreon, died as a result of swallowing a piece of fruit skin,

and the race was impoverished when that voice, with its music and the haunting cadence of its verse, was stilled. So had Uzziah lived longer, Isaiah might have missed the beatific sight that had such stupendous consequences both for him and his race. He would not have been in that chastened mood in which God could speak to him. Suppose he had lacked the sensitiveness that, like a photographic plate, once exposed, can retain the impressions made on it? How much his people, and even Christianity owe to the crisis that brought him so near to God, and God so near to him!

The night precedes the purple mystery of dawn, even as it shows up the brightness of the morning star. In the hour when Isaiah had almost lost faith in everything, light came. He saw a vision of the Omnipotent One. Seated on His throne, begirt by the seraphim, God's glory broke upon his eyes. The sun itself was dim in comparison with the dazzling radiance of that supernal Being. The voice of many waters, leaping boisterously over some lip of rock to crash into abysmal depths, was nought compared with the antiphonal chant: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" filling the vast vault of heaven with its sonorous chords. What mighty contrasts confronted the prophet. Uzziah was leprous, itself the scriptural emblem of sin's defilement; Jehovah was the all-holy. Earthly monarchs had to bow to the inexorable summons of death; the Heavenly endured.

Changes of dynasty brought unrest, turmoil, and uncertainty; the will of God was unvarying, yielding serenity and strength to man.

Could a mortal look on such a sight and live? Isaiah's self-complacency was dispelled. A deep sense of sin and unworthiness swept over him. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." It is often supposed that memories of the past flash like lightning before the eyes of a drowning man. Remorse and misgiving undoubtedly do when a man is brought face to face with God's holy character and will. Isaiah's broken vows, his rebellious words, his querulous complaints, no less than the formal lip-service which did duty for worship in that day, came back to him. Still, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Realized need affords an entrance to the soul. God is infinitely tender, and not retribution but repentance, followed by restoration, are His object for mankind.

An angel turned from the altar, holding a glowing coal in the tongs. Touching the lips of the contrite prince with this, the heartening assurance is given that his iniquity is taken away, and his sin purged. Cleansed thus by the celestial ministrations, Isaiah is prepared for the fuller revelation of God's purpose. Blessing and obligation are inseparable. He had beheld the wondrous glory of the Almighty; he had

surrendered to the impulse for readjustment thus stirred. Then hearing the voice, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" at once came the immediate response, "'Here am I; send me.'"

Isaiah's consciousness of his own sin and the awful holiness of Jehovah lay behind his anger against Judah where, like his predecessors in the north, he was to be God's witness. His chief aim, however, was to warn and save the people from the inevitable results of their folly rather than merely to denounce. And the hardest phase of his work in endeavouring to bring Judah to a better frame of mind, was the internal situation.

During the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham, Judah had been allowed to develop in comparative peace. Apart from occasional sorties against the Philistines and Ammonites, nothing disturbed the deep flow of her life. When, however, Ahaz, son of Jotham, took the sceptre, storm-clouds were forming in the sky. Ahaz was only a youth. He was not only inexperienced, but also he had neither strength of will nor natural capacity to deal with intricate questions of foreign policy. These early presented themselves. His northern neighbour, Pekah, king of Israel, combining with Rezin of Syria, sought to embroil the young king in a revolt against his Assyrian overlord. There was, however, one on whom Ahaz could depend. Isaiah freely placed his counsel at the disposal

of Ahaz, entreating him to stand outside this Syro-Ephraimitish coalition.

But both the court and the country were panic-stricken by the menace. The prophet, seeking to allay such fears, told the king that he need have no dread of "these two tails of smoking firebrands." If he would turn to Jehovah and seek a sign from Him, the divine Helper of Judah would confirm His servant's words. Ahaz, foolishly objecting that he would not tempt the Lord, tried to conceal his own weakness and distrust by a show of piety. The fact was, he had already decided to appeal to Assyria for protection against the coalition. This help was readily promised—for a consideration. The allied forces were compelled to withdraw, but not before Jerusalem, which had been besieged, had suffered severe privations and its defenders heavy loss. Tiglath-Pileser took Damascus, and Ahaz went north to render homage to him. This was contrary to everything Isaiah had advised. The consequence was as the prophet foresaw. Judah became the tribute-paying vassal of Assyria. Those fetters, so wantonly assumed by the king, were to be worn for many a year, but their weight was to rest not upon him and the ruling classes, but upon the struggling tradesfolk and the small holders who tilled the land.

Although Isaiah had tried vainly to turn Ahaz from his foolish and short-sighted policy, that did not quench the light of revelation. If the promise of

deliverance were disregarded by the king, the hope of a Deliverer had a fuller significance than even Isaiah himself perceived. The universal sovereignty of God, which Amos had formerly declared, was reiterated by Isaiah. The whole world was under His control. Thrones might rise and fall. Prosperity might recede or advance. Unchanging, God's will would slowly unfold. "Go to the man who is carving a stone for a building," says Phillips Brooks. "Ask him where that stone is going, to what part of the temple, and how he is going to get it into place, and what does he do? He points you to the builder's plans. This is only one stone of many. So, when men shall ask where and how is your little achievement going into God's plan, go on doing your service as faithfully as if the whole temple were yours to build." Judah could hinder the outworking of the divine scheme because it valued too lightly its sacred functions. Suppose she failed in some degree to be the vehicle of blessing? Suppose God's word fell for a time on unheeding ears? Its echoing harmonies, those swelling chords drowning the discords of hate and the clash of contending forces, would yet be appreciated. The Messiah would come. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

While the nation exulted in the temporary security, bought so dearly of Tiglath-Pileser, Isaiah was encouraged to further effort by the thought of that

Messiah and His rule. "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end." A man of smaller mould, or without the inspiration of "the mighty hopes that make us men," would have despaired. But the prophet continued his thankless task. It was useless for a people of such limited resources, and one called by Jehovah for a specific object, to entangle itself with foreign affairs. Judah was neither required to do so, nor could she hope for anything but disaster as the result. Isaiah proclaimed this with tireless persistency. The wisest course was for her to cut herself loose from all entanglements, and to commit her borders to the protection of Jehovah. To depend on either Assyria or Egypt would mean that, sooner or later, she would become the tool of her stronger neighbours. If victory came to them, she would be denied any share in the spoils; if defeat came, she would certainly suffer most. She must maintain absolute neutrality. "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. . . ." That was better than any armed force. And in place of panic, should be tranquillity, for, affirmed the prophet, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee."

It was like a voice crying in the wilderness. Notwithstanding the load of taxation, the nation went on its way. It was indifferent to the signs of the times. Had it not been so engrossed with its buying and selling, its revelling and indolence at one end of the

social scale, and its abject pessimism at the other, it might have noted an object-lesson across the border. Israel was doomed. Neglectful of God, and oblivious to the high traditions of the fathers, they would shortly reap the crop of their inexcusable wilfulness. Wordsworth wrote of a later day:

> "The World is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"

It was just as true then. Isaiah was dealing with an obstinate race, as headstrong as it was blind to its best interests. He foretold the destruction, first of Israel, then of Judah, although there was a remnant which should be saved. He denounced the wrongs inflicted by the privileged classes on the less fortunate, but he was also fearless in castigating those sins common to both.

In his self-abnegation, Isaiah proved his innate greatness. Had he turned a deaf ear to God's call, he could have retained his princely rank, but would he have been half so princely? Peter the Great, of Russia, was duly famed because he laboured in the dockyards of another land in order to aid his own people in industrial expansion. Through the trials that came to Dante, Florence had one less sleek, well-fed citizen; but instead, the world gained a wondrous seer. Had St. Paul disobeyed the heavenly

summons, life might have been more pleasant for him, its ambitions reached, and its goal compassed; but would it have been a thousandth part as influential or as potent for good?

Hezekiah's accession marks the second group of Isaiah's prophecies. They deal mainly with the future of Assyria and Judah. The hour was more propitious. Although the yoke was still on Judah's neck, she was not unduly harassed by her powerful ally. The fact was, Assyria had troubles enough at home. After the fall of Samaria, and the deportation of the Ten Tribes, internal unrest kept the conqueror fully occupied, and Palestine remained for a time unmolested. Hezekiah was inclined to follow the advice of one whose predictions were so signally fulfilled as far as Israel was concerned. Perhaps it were wise, he argued, to give better heed to the solemn obligations imposed by the covenant with Jehovah. So a few reforms were carried out. An attempt was made to re-centralize worship at Jerusalem. This involved the destruction of idolatrous sanctuaries in various parts of the country, where sensual rites were practised either in secret or openly. Strangely enough, Judah was peculiarly susceptible to the religious customs of other peoples. The Ashera was a Canaanitish system rendering homage to the reproductive powers of Nature. Nehushtan, and even Adonis, were worshipped. Magic and divination were freely used, and a form of Totemism,

derived most likely from the nomad tribes, flourished. The cults of Asherim and images, with their attendant evils, were afterwards brought under the lash of Isaiah's anger. The brazen serpent, relic of the desert days, having become an object of superstitious veneration, was destroyed. Many of those reforms were, however, without the complete sanction of the nation, and the effects of Hezekiah's zeal were transient. The king, moved by a high sense of duty, also tried to conserve the spiritual treasures of the land. He gathered a group of scholars who copied out anew many of the sacred books, and according to Prov. XXV: 1, brought together several of Solomon's maxims, so that his wisdom might not be wholly lost. The music and services of the Temple were likewise developed at the king's direction.

While Hezekiah continued to pay the customary tribute to Assyria, a new feeling of resentment sprang up in Jerusalem. A group posing as patriots saw a means of escaping from this detested burden. A defensive arrangement with Egypt proffered relief, for with the help of the southern power, they could defy any attempt of Assyria to hold them to an unconscionable bargain. It seems remarkable that Isaiah, who had fought so strenuously against Assyrian aid at the outset, should now as stoutly support the agreement to which the nation stood pledged. Perhaps he felt that, no matter what its drawbacks, Judah ought not to break faith with one who had

previously assisted her; or, more probably, he saw that in a choice of two evils, it were better to

> ". . . . Bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of."

Hezekiah, unfortunately, was favourably disposed towards an Egyptian compact. Then the prophet made a dramatic entry into the capital. If words were impotent to carry conviction, he would appeal to the rulers in another way. Barefooted, and wearing only a loin-cloth, like some poor slave who had been stripped of all but a vestige of manhood, this one-time prince of Judah appeared among the gaily-clad courtiers and pompous merchants of the city. The burst of merriment provoked by the sight was only momentary. The gravity of his face, the solemn air of this devout man, grown prematurely old in the service of his fellows, stifled such unseemly mirth. Mistaken though his motives, crazed by his foolish insistence on impending doom though perchance Isaiah was, none could doubt his sincerity. They learned that he was thus portraying the fate which awaited both Egypt and Ethiopia, and that, therefore, it were the height of folly to trust in such broken reeds. Yet the statesmen of that day were certain that Jehovah, the mighty Ally of their fathers, could be counted on.

The prophet's plan was fruitful. Hezekiah, and those who advocated the Egyptian policy, were

compelled to heed the warning so graphically given. Then news came that some Philistine cities, trying to break away from Sargon, who now reigned over Assyria, had received condign punishment. A later attempt by Ashdod to adopt a similar course was followed by a cruel siege, the city captured, and its people carried into bondage. Thus the danger of a breach was averted as far as Judah was concerned. But it was not for long. A prince of South Babylonia, Merodach-Baladan, seizing the throne of Babylon, proclaimed his independence. Assyria resisted in vain. This new power was one with which she could not cope. The yoke was cast off. Other nations still under tribute began to move towards liberation. Merodach sent an embassy to Hezekiah, ostensibly to congratulate him on his recovery from a severe illness, but really to invite joint action against Assyria. The king was flattered. He not only received the envoys cordially, but also displayed his treasures and military resources with boyish glee. This called down on him the wrath of Isaiah. It was inviting spoliation! To lay bare the cherished adornments of God's Temple was taking liberties with what was not his! And the prophet's eyes flashed as he pointed to the vessels of gold, declaring that, though none might believe it, those revered possessions would one day be carried away to Babylon with the flower of the nation's manhood and womanhood!

It was a prophecy destined to become only too true. Hezekiah, resenting any criticism of his actions, later found that Merodach-Baladan, his new friend, was not nearly as strong as he had imagined. Sargon marched on Merodach, and stamping out the revolt which had flourished so long, subjugated Babylonia once more. Four years passed. Sargon was assassinated, and again the prince asserted his independence. Sennacherib, the new sovereign, advanced to punish such insolence. The chance was swiftly seized by Hezekiah's counsellors to advise again a league with Egypt. And all that Isaiah said was discounted. Madness swept over the kingdom from one end to the other. The prophet was like a child trying to hold back the waters of the ocean with a rampart of sand. Hezekiah precipitated the dreaded crisis by withholding his tribute. Other vassals, emboldened by his example, followed suit. Freedom was in the air. "Drunk with sight of power" eager throngs paraded the streets of Jerusalem. At last they were their own masters! The hated lordship of Assyria was no more!

The dull rumblings of the approaching thunders broke through the senseless babel of hysterical patriotism. Sennacherib had chastised Babylon. He then swept south through Syria and Phœnicia. The revolt crumbled beneath the tread of his armed hosts. A body of Egyptians and Arabians, reinforcing the men of Ekron, checked his progress temporarily, but

they were overwhelmed. Part of the Assyrian army was then directed against Jerusalem. The city was closely invested. And only by an enormous ransom was the foeman bought off. In order to pay this, despite the protests of Isaïah, the king stripped the gold even from the doors of the Temple. And as the army made its way back from the city, Hezekiah realized his stupidity in neglecting the advice of Isaiah, and heeding those who favoured Egypt.

But the trouble was not over. Impressed by a report of Jerusalem's defences, and anticipating that it might again prove a source of annoyance to him, Sennacherib sent another force from Lachish demanding the complete surrender of the city. A vivid narrative is unfolded in II Kings. Rabshakeh harangued the citizens on the walls, pointing out that the gods of all nations were utterly helpless before his imperial master. Moreover, good would follow submission whereas stubbornness would be summarily punished. Once more Isaiah stepped into the breach, encouraging the king with assurances of Jehovah's help. The prophet's belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem finds a parallel in subsequent history. When the Carthaginian troops besieged Rome, a plot of ground on which Hannibal's tent stood at that moment, was put up for auction in the Forum. After brisk competition, it was bought by a citizen who had faith in the valour of the defenders, and who was sure that, even though the foe hammered at the city's

gates, he would ultimately be driven back, and peace restored.

Hezekiah's courage was kindled anew. When further demands were sent, the king took the missive, and spreading it before Jehovah, made confession of his dastardly declension and vowed obedience. His cry was heard. Isaiah, who had foretold the siege, now promised deliverance. "Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there. . . . By the way that he came, by the same shall he return . . . for I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." An unexplained catastrophe overtook the besiegers, and the prophet's word was literally fulfilled. That night, a sudden pestilence smote the Assyrian force. The maritime plains were always subject to such visitations. Word of the disaster reached Sennacherib, and he and his warriors retired whence they came, never again to raise their arms against Judah.

Then Isaiah was finally vindicated? Human nature is an inexplicable thing. Judah resumed payment of tribute to its overlord, and the lessons of the years were unlearned. Manasseh took the sceptre from his father, Hezekiah. The prophet of God still remained to exert what influence he could, but his power which had, for a time, been felt, speedily waned. His glowing prophecies had not all been fulfilled. The dull minds about him sought literal

and swift realization of their hopes or nothing at all. Assyria still ruled with iron hand; Jehovah appeared to be absent from the stage of events. Reaction set in. Manasseh adopted idolatrous modes of worship to the neglect of Jehovah. Human sacrifices were made to Moloch. Persecution was instigated against those who followed the guidance of Isaiah, and the streets of the holy city ran with the blood of the martyred. What of Isaiah himself? The end of this fearless prophet of God is shrouded in uncertainty. Tradition has it that he was assassinated. Some who were exasperated by the unpalatable truths he proclaimed vowed they could endure him no longer and put him to death. Whether that was so or not, we cannot say. Yet such was not an improbable ending to a life so loyal to God and so exalted in tone.

Did Isaiah fail to achieve his goal? It was not for him to question the issues of his work. His one concern was to proclaim the word of the Lord. As Lincoln once finely said: "I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to be true." A burning and a shining light, this princely man, divesting himself of position and privilege like the very Messiah whom he heralded, bent himself to the needs of the hour. The nation required one who, amid the duplicity and intrigues of the court, would stand foursquare to every wind of changing policy. The highest good of the people, jeopardized as it was by the indifference of their leaders, or by their open defection from the pure

worship of Jehovah, demanded one who had seen the Lord, and to whom God was a glorious reality. All this Isaiah was, and more. There were vital facts which had been either overlooked or unperceived. These were revealed to the sensitive soul of this man. Jehovah was absolute in majesty and power. Yet His was not the strength of a tyrannical potentate to whom man was a mere puppet, to be fondled or crushed at will. He was holy in character and long-suffering in His attitude towards those who bore His image.

Moreover, Judah was not intended to be simply as the other nations of the earth. She had been chosen for a special function. The Almighty had bound her to Him in order that not only might she receive blessing—that was freely admitted by the nation—but also that she might transmit it. The latter, through wilful disobedience, and the rejection of her ideals, had been ignored. Would God then cast her off? That would in part defeat His own object. He was patient, as well as undeterred from His aims. The fires of war should refine the precious metal, intended to be recast in accordance with the divine plan. Tears of remorse to be shed in an alien land would cleanse the eyes to behold again God's gracious will. Best of all, the Messianic Prince, born of their historic line, would gather together the chosen people. Founding His throne, and weaving a spell of sacrificial love over the hearts of

men, the whole race should see the eternal purpose that made for holiness and strength.

Isaiah was faithful to his entrusted mission. And the effects of the dependable life are immeasurable. It may be that:

> "The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interred with their bones."

But reverse that statement, and we are not far from the truth about the earnest and devout as well. They make mistakes; they share the common limitations and defects of humanity. The evil may be benevolently forgotten, but the good they accomplish is enduring. A life guided by lofty principles and at one with the Infinite inspires others to noble striving long after the man himself has finished his days.

Of the many gifted men to be found in the sphere of literature, few rival the brilliance of John Keats. He has been described as "the youngest to rise and earliest to set in that brilliant constellation of poets" which illumined the nineteenth century. Keats was a choice soul, magnanimous and modest. Though numerous anxieties taxed faith and patience, his brave spirit was seldom subdued by them. And diligently aspiring to the worthiest accomplishment in poetry, his life was one of high persistence towards the heights of manhood. He was the friend of Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, and Shelley, and acquainted too with Lamb and Wordsworth. Ambitious, but modest in

the extreme; strong, and yet gracious, what might he not have attained had he not been cut down so early? One of the most poignant pages of biography is that recording his love and engagement. The light of joy had scarcely dawned when, amid thick clouds of penury and ill-health, coupled with his intense desire to succeed, it was blotted out. The victim of consumption, he sailed for Italy, but the bony fingers of the spectre had already laid hold of him. Humbly devout, resigned, and quietly trusting as the end approached, he exclaimed, "Thank God it has come!" To this day, his tomb may be seen in the Protestant burial-ground in Rome, bearing this inscription:

> "This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who, on his death-bed, in the bitterness of his heart at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraved on his tombstone, 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' "

Keats was less than fair to himself. Allowance must be made for his weariness, and the shafts which made him their mark. Multitudes of people who have never read his poems, not even *Endymion* from which the quotation is taken, recall one memorable line:

> "A thing of beauty is a joy forever."

That can be fittingly said of many things, but it is true most of all of the soul. We may apply it to Keats himself, to the prophet Isaiah, to Elizabeth Fry, Frances E. Willard, William Wilberforce, Abraham

Lincoln, and to thousands more whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Thus was it with this prince, patriot, and prophet of God. Even though he had no more claim to the admiration of today than any other figure of the past, his splendid devotion to duty, and the eternal truths which, by the divine Spirit, he voiced, would make his place secure among the immortals. His accents ring down the centuries. The words he uttered, without having seen their full meaning at the time, any more than he saw the complete fulfilment of his prophecies, still throb with power. That glorious Prince of the house of David was revealed. The Desire of all nations, born in Bethlehem and dying on Calvary, yet risen victorious from the dead, demonstrates the validity of Isaiah's faith, and is the final pledge of victory. The path has not yet been trodden to the end. The slowly evolving plans of God remain incomplete even as Isaiah felt them to be in his day. He knew that Babylon was still to cast its sombre shadows over the national life. Judah had not turned from its error to the living God. A long and tortuous way had to be pursued ere the Messianic reign began. Jerusalem, every stone of which he loved, would be laid desolate before deliverance came. How then could Isaiah still hope in God? Simply, because his hope was *in God!* Steadfastly he did his part, and kept the faith. Appearances to the contrary, his work was not in vain. And for us, though there may

be much in modern life to harass and bewilder, though obstacles are many and progress is slow, we can find grounds for optimism in patient trust. There is no greater motive for the heart that would be strong and true than this:

"Life shall on and upward go;
Th' eternal step of progress beats
To that great anthem, calm and slow,
Which God repeats.

God works in all things; all obey
His first propulsion from the night:
Wake thou and watch!—the world is grey
With morning light."

## MICAH, THE HERALD OF THE MORN

Belonging to southern Judah, his work covered the period B.C. 720–695 but embraced the reigns of:

Jotham,
Ahaz,
Hezekiah.

Micah was thus a contemporary of Isaiah.

## *VI. MICAH*

"Of the people . . . and for the people." This phrase from Lincoln's Gettysburg speech might well be used to describe the life and work of Micah, the Morasthite. His appeal to the present day is found in this: he is the herald of the golden day, the prophet of the good time coming. According to the book itself, his work was carried on during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. But it was principally in the time of Hezekiah that Micah became prominent. His theme was the social wrongs which were not only demoralizing the southern tribes, but also estranging them from Jehovah. And it was because he felt these things so acutely, that he spoke so forcibly.

Micah provides an interesting study. He stands the poles apart from his distinguished contemporary, Isaiah, who at this time was about midway in his prophetic career. Isaiah was of noble parentage, a man of education and refinement, whose environment was the court. Living in Jerusalem, he was concerned chiefly with the political movements of the king and his advisers. Micah, however, was a man at the opposite extreme. He belonged to the people; his sympathies were with those whose life

he shared. Far from the madding crowd of those contending for favour and preferment, he looked at things not with the eyes of the diplomatist or the party intriguer, but with the clear vision of the onlooker who sees most of the game.

He was a native, we are told, of Moresheth-Gath. This village was probably situated on the borders of Philistia, on a low range of hills overlooking a fruitful district, with cornfields and olive-groves, interspersed in the spring with gurgling brooks. Moresheth would, therefore, command a broad view of the towns studding the plain, their battlements gleaming in the sun, and the tiny houses nestling within the white walls. But, in the distance, Micah would also see the level stretches, across which the formidable columns of Assyria had marched, leaving a trail of desolation behind them too horrible to describe, yet not to be banished from the prophet's mind.

There are other sidelights in the book enabling us to form a picture of the man himself. That he was a keen observer of Nature, may be inferred from the materials he uses. There are several references to natural phenomena. To him, the mountains seemed to move at Jehovah's approach, as wax melts before the fire. The sheep and the fold are a type of God's people. Like the gloom descending on the land after sunset, night was to enfold the false prophets, and darkness would reign because the truth had been excluded from Judah's heart. Zion would become

like a ploughed field. While, when happier days came once more, ploughshares and pruninghooks shaped from obsolete weapons, vines and fig-trees, sheaves ingathered and grain being thrashed, were figures of the blessedness that would follow from the Messianic advent. The flocks amid the luscious pastures, the dew and the showers upon the grass, illustrated the happy return to plenteousness and peace; and the tribe of Jacob, like a lion compared with the beasts of the forest, should be strong and unafraid. The wicked and perverse, however, were as those who sow without reaping the fruits of their labour, who tread the olives without gaining the oil of gladness. And like thorns and briers, their true character would presently be made plain even to the casual wayfarer.

William Blake, the famous artist-poet, used to say "To the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees, as the eye is formed, such are its powers. You certainly mistake, when you say that the visions of fancy are not to be found in this world. To me this world is all one continued vision of fancy or imagination, and I feel flattered when I am told so. What is it sets Homer, Virgil, and Milton in so high a rank of art? Why is the Bible more entertaining and instructive than any other book? Is it not because they are addressed to the imagination, which is spiritual sensation, and but immediately to the understanding

or reason?" If that statement be accurate, then we can understand why Micah found the world of Nature teeming with suggestive symbols and parables.

A broad division of the prophet's writings may be made. He first deals with the social condition of his age, emphasizing the fact that, just as Samaria's fall was due to her sins, so a like fate menaces Judah unless her rulers and priests repent, and the rank and file seek the better way. The second section (Chs. IV–V) shows the pitiable state of the country. Like shepherdless sheep, her people are scattered. But in the providence of God a divine Shepherd shall be raised up. The Messiah would come. Again, genuine religion and its claims are expounded in the third section (Chs. VI–VII). Godlessness is still rampant. The doom of disobedience is portrayed. Still, the will of the Eternal, hindered in its operation by human folly, cannot be frustrated. God and goodness shall finally prevail.

Jehovah is viewed by the prophet as One who is glorious in power, yet holy in character and aim. The transgression of the Northern Kingdom filled Him with righteous indignation, and so the Nemesis of Israel's wickedness descended on her with a scourge of cords. That retribution sets forth the unvarying principles of righteousness, and the wretchedness which wrongdoing entails. Micah's attention, however, is centred on Judah. In graphic terms, he voices Jehovah's protest. "Hear ye, O

mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel." The Almighty makes His appeal to history and experience. The deliverance from Egypt wrought for their fathers by the omnipotent arm, and the work of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, are cited. God's unfailing hand, sustaining the pioneers through desert days, guiding their steps, protecting them from their foes, beckons now to the succeeding generation to draw near to Him. All He has done for the nation in past days ought to awaken gratitude and glad acquiescence in His gracious will.

The prophet hears an objection raised. Had not the people recognized their indebtedness to Jehovah? While some acknowledgment had assuredly been made in their religious observances, he retorts, it had been only formal. There was no sincerity behind them. Thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil, even the offering of their children which they had sometimes been disposed to make, were vain. Petitions framed by impenitent lips were impotent to procure blessing. As the guilty king in *Hamlet* says:

> "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

Judah's altars might be heaped with sacrifices; they could never be a substitute for justice, mercy, and humility. A good tree must bring forth good fruit.

As matters stood, ceremonies and ritual, correct to the last detail, existed side by side with the most flagrant abuses. Tyranny and oppression marked the relations between rich and poor. Commerce was permeated with dishonest practices. Wicked balances and deceitful weights enriched the merchant at the expense of the buyer. Falsehood and fraud strutted brazenly in the gates. And yet, as Micah confidently affirmed, the Almighty was long-suffering. He desired the repentance and return of His children from their foolish ways. If they would hear His voice, then gladness and good might again be their possession.

Tolstoy draws an almost parallel picture of the Russia of his day. "Even in the time of serfdom, the peasants used to say to their masters: 'We are yours, but the land is ours.' That is, they recognized that however unlawful and cruel is the possession by one man of another, the right of possession of land by him who does not work it is still more unlawful and cruel. . . . The time has come when the injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of the possession of land by those who do not work upon it have grown as obvious as, fifty years ago, were the injustice, irrationality, and cruelty of the possession of serfs. . . . All those who possess land as well as those deprived of it, now clearly see what formerly they did not see—that if a peasant, who had been, and is, working all his life, has not sufficient bread owing to

his having no land to sow in, if children and old people have no milk because they have no pasture, if they have not their own piece of wood to repair their rotten hut and warm it, while by their side a non-working landlord, living in his enormous park, feeds puppies with milk, builds pavilions and stables with plate-glass windows, breeds sheep, and grows woods and parks upon thousands of acres, spends and eats up in a week as much as would have maintained the neighbouring starving village for a whole year—that such an organization of life should not be. . . . And as soon as men recognize the injustice of any of their institutions, that institution, one way or another, inevitably comes to an end."

When Micah turned from matters of general import to the professed leaders of religion, he was pitiless. Much of what was hollow and superficial in the people's worship was due to the hypocrisy of the priests and spurious prophets. They flattered the affluent. They spoke smooth words which fell pleasantly on the ear, convincing the privileged few that God had entered into a holy covenant with them. Yet the fact that it was a *holy* covenant, and that the validity of it was contingent on both parties being true to their word, was skilfully ignored. Thus men were drugged with the narcotic of reiterated assurances of "Peace, peace." In Nevada, there is a stretch of sun-scorched desert, seventy-five miles long, surrounded by mountains of lava. Dappled with

gleaming pools glinting like sapphires, the traveller sees its beauty from a distance, and then he is tempted, as he finds himself in the midst of this otherwise arid waste, to quench his thirst from the clear waters. But death lurks there. Those pools are strongly impregnated with arsenic; to drink means almost certain death. So Judah had been led to the waters of false promises. There could be no peace for people in such a plight. Lasting satisfaction was unattainable. There was no element in a life severed from the Lord which could yield happiness and serenity. Rest of heart was no more possible in such circumstances than health can be when a malignant growth is allowed to remain in the body.

This man of God looked at the city streets with their teeming, thoughtless multitudes. He might almost have said with Francis Thompson, that strange waif of London's crowded pavements: "I unveil their secret meanings, I read their human hieroglyphs. I diagnose from a hundred occult signs the disease which perturbs their populous pulses. Misery cries out to me from the kerbstone, despair passes me by in the ways; I discern limbs laden with fetters impalpable, but not imponderable; I hear the shaking of invisible lashes." Truly, grief strove with detestation as the prophet saw the tragedy of a nation alienated from God, and, incredible though it seemed, the people were content to have it so.

Back there again in Moresheth-Gath, with the

sylvan beauty of Nature about him, the loathsomeness of human wickedness and heinous sin stood out in more appalling guise as he thought of it. Men might have been happy; they were, instead, paying for the obliquity of their rulers. Then the divine request for a spokesman was heard. An impulse throbbed in his soul. He had no choice but to take his place as a prophet of the Unseen, his authority the inner conviction that he was the representative of Jehovah. If the late Dr. John Watson's view of the ministerial function be correct, then Micah had indeed a worthy idea of his office. "I now clearly see," says the Doctor, "every sentence should suggest Christ, and every sermon, even though His name had not been mentioned, nor His words quoted, should leave the hearer at the feet of Christ." Micah's all-mastering desire was to bring men thus face to face with God.

We once went to see Munkâcsy's great painting, "Ecce Homo." In the time at our disposal, we had to listen to the professional lecturer who, in unemotional tones, enlarged on the sacred scene. While he drew attention to the figure of our Lord, and to the various other characters depicted, we longed to be alone with that picture if only for an hour. One party of visitors filed out; others took their places, and the dreary description commenced again. We could not help thinking of the priest who receives pilgrims in Antwerp Cathedral, and who, without a

word, draws aside the curtains from some of the masterpieces there, and leaves the beholder in silent contemplation of Christ's face. So Micah strove to stimulate desire for the good by showing the love of God and the deprivation that sin and selfishness entailed. He sought to win them from the base to the best. If a man be so immersed in the things of time that he cannot raise his thoughts any higher than his daily affairs, then loss is inevitable. That was the reason for Micah's straight speaking. He did not find fault for the sake of being critical. His one object was to remedy the evils that were so apparent.

Micah himself is worthy of the warmest commendation. There was nothing to be gained by outspokenness, except peace of mind in carrying out God's will. There was much to lose. His life might be endangered. He certainly would have to carry a grievous load of care. His credentials would be questioned, his best motives impugned, even his sanity doubted. That mattered not. He must be true, cost what it might. The allied forces of the priesthood, politicians, and plutocrats, ranged themselves against him. But God was on his side, or, rather, he was on God's side. And as Wendell Phillips well said, "One on God's side is a majority." Thus, firm for the right, Micah sought to stem the tide of disregard of God's law with his own stout heart. And though he felt at times that he was accomplishing but little, his faith never faltered. The

glorious hope held out by the prophet centred in the person of the Messiah who was to come. He too was to be born of the people. Though of a princely line, His home would be, not in the capital, where thoughtless gaiety and revelry ran riot, nor with the favoured and leisured classes, but among the ordinary families of the earth. He was to be in touch with the common needs of mankind. And the heart-hunger and need for relief from life's vicissitudes were to be as familiar to Him as the daily round. That was full of cheer to those whom Micah addressed. The men in authority failed to understand those they ruled. That was the fatal mistake Britain made in her treatment of what were then the American colonies. Her statesmen did not take the trouble to enquire into the grievances which pressed upon the people. So there came not only a sanguinary war with all its attendant ills, but also a deplorable division between those who worshipped the same God, who spoke the same tongue, and who sprang from the same stock.

The prophet outlined his vision of hope for the world. The dawn of a glorious day is presaged by strands of gold embroidering the dark hangings of night and brightening the eastern sky. Bethlehem-Judah was the original seat of David's family. There joy would be born. The promised Deliverer, awaited by the pious for so long, would be manifested. How or when, Micah could not determine. Yet like Isaiah, who had also spoken of the Messianic splendour,

Micah finds inspiration for the dim present in the radiant future. Hostilities would come to an end, and the arts of peace flourish once more. Warriors would beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks. Through the influence of the Prince of Peace, war would appear in its true garb—not decked with flaunting banners and gaudy pennons, the blare of bugles and the thunderous tread of the warriors drowning the tearful laments of those on whom its insupportable griefs must come. It was a relic of the jungle's mode of settling disputes. That dream, so finely expressed by Tennyson, would, under His regal sway, be realized:

"For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see;
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be. . . .
Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world."

The Messianic Master was to be so closely related to common humanity that men should look to Him as their champion and emancipator. "This Man shall be our peace."

How Christ fulfilled that prophecy, we well know. Whether Micah grasped the full content of his message or not, we need not discuss. We have but to recall a few facts of Christ's life to see how accurate the prediction. He was born in Bethlehem, as the prophet had foretold. Strangely enough, His mother

was far from Nazareth where she lived, and it was in the City of David, and into a family of the royal lineage that Jesus came. Although His birth linked Him to kings, He was also one of the people. He was taught in the hard school of experience what it meant for men to live under the misrule of the strong, and to be plagued by the unscrupulous. He was a unique combination of aristocracy and democracy, of royal blood and common toil—a perfect Redeemer for a sad world. He was known as the carpenter's Son. Never was He happier than when He had the burdened and sorrowing at His side. His teachings were couched in the language of the folk about Him. Even when He spoke of things unseen, the illiterate and ignorant, no less than the cultured and erudite, felt the impact of His magnetic personality, for His words were made to live by home-like illustrations and telling quotations from the book of life. And Hope's gladdening beam illumined grief-laden and wearied souls plodding along the daily path.

Looking from the vantage-point of the Gospel narratives, we observe how Jesus embodied the ideals of which the prophet had dreamed. Knowing man perfectly meant much; but knowing God's will for man meant even more. In His own life He showed the delights of freedom. He was shackled neither by convention nor by sin. Beyond the thraldom of narrow and unworthy ideas of God, and that literalism which changed what might have been a fruitful glade

into a desert of ritual ordinances, He gave that glad assent to the Father's will that made life worth living. Micah had given to his own generation possibly the clearest definition of the religious life ever framed. With fine discernment he had asked, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" That interrogative remained unanswered in actual practice until Jesus came. It was He who minted the gold and made it current coin.

Take His conception of "doing justly." When they asked Him that test-question whether it were lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not, He replied, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's." There was no other who translated mercy into daily deeds as He did. The Son of Man came not to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might find peace, blessedness, and life. When the self-styled guardians of morality brought to Him one who had sinned grievously, urging Him to pronounce sentence, He said to them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." With flushed faces and down-turned eyes they slunk away one by one. "Where are those thine accusers?" He asked the woman, "Hath no man condemned thee? . . . Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Jesus loved mercy. Burning reproaches would have seared the soul, but the tender, understanding sym-

pathy of the Master's heart led the sinner into the joyous path of forgiveness and strength.

A strange quality of the opal is, that, when cold, it is lustreless and lacking much of its accustomed beauty. When it is taken into the warm hand, however, or placed on the finger, it begins to glow with soft iridescence, alluring and lovely in the extreme. Its latent glory becomes visible. Other lives, marred by sin, touched by His redemptive love and cleansing grace, gave forth the reflected light of His countenance as no mere logic can explain. Its guilt erased, its fears allayed, the heart reconciled to God finds that Christ indeed makes peace through the blood of His cross. With Micah's word lingering in the mind, another fact greets us. Notwithstanding the power Jesus wielded, there is a wondrous humility about Him. "I can of Mine own self do nothing," He said. If ever a man walked humbly with his God, it was He. His refusal to receive kingly honours on one occasion, even as the specious temptation suggesting that He had but to bow the knee to the Evil One and all the kingdoms of the earth would be His, are consistent with the tenor of His life. And thus as the Theanthropos—the God-man—He provides the meeting-place between the All-holy and mankind.

A journal, some time ago, told of two young people who, after being married several years, had reached that point where they had decided to separate by consent. It was incompatibility of temperament!

There was one little boy, who was to be in the care of the father. Then came the day when the woman went to what had been their home, to find the place in the hands of the auctioneers. Things she had helped to choose, that she had loved and cherished, were all there. But now they were marked with detestable little tickets, "Lot No. . . . " Up and down the stairs trooped the careless crowd. Some were legitimate buyers; others merely the idly curious. Even the room she had called her own, safe from intrusion, together with those which had formed the happy sphere of domestic life, were given over to the invading throng. She was walking downstairs with a heavy heart, when, unexpectedly, she met her husband coming up. He, too, had dropped in to see what was progressing. He was frigidly polite to her: she was polite frigidity. Just then, however, a chubby little fellow darted out from one of the rooms. Apparently, he did not know that some restraint was required by the peculiar situation of the moment. Seeing his parents on the landing, he cried with delight. "Hello, mummie! hello, daddy!" Then laying hold of the hand of each, he sought to swing himself between them as he had often done before. As the two looked into the child's face, they seemed compelled next to look into each other's eyes. It was the man who spoke first. "I say, what fools we are! Why can't we be like this again?" And with a half-sob she answered, sadly, "Why can't we?" Those two alien-

ated hearts had been brought together again by a child.

That is a parable. By the hands of this One—the Child of Bethlehem's manger—God and man are brought together again. God was not estranged from the race. Quite the reverse; His love was ever yearning over misled and erring humanity. But the two, by the divine-human hands of Him who is our peace, are brought together, and so reunion is possible. This message cannot lose its appeal. It is still the story that saves life from despair. Micah unfolded his message of heartenment to the men of his day. It was a period similar to our own in some respects. But the purpose and promise here revealed kindle a light which, if it does not completely dispel the darkness of strange providences and inexplicable tragedies, still sheds its rays upon the road. It guides the feet of the wayfarer to Him in whom is the solution of all our problems, and who is the means to the ultimate triumph of the Divine will.

Puzzling and depressing are the ways of life, but the heart can still rejoice. God's promises, realized in part as the Deliverer came forth from Bethlehem, shall be fully kept. Micah was convinced that he could depend on the Lord. Need we be less certain? His optimism makes for our encouragement. The unchanging God is behind all the chance and changes of the years, and in Him we may confidently trust. This the prophet affirms; this the experience of the

faithful endorses. Micah stands before the race, courageous and calm, testifying to the controlling power of Almighty God, and in this hour he might well exclaim:

> " . . . I heard a voice upon the slope
> Cry to the summit. 'Is there any hope?'
> To which an answer peal'd from that high land,
> But in a tongue no man could understand;
> And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn."

And the day shall yet break, glorious and fair!

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVENTH CENTURY

## *INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVENTH CENTURY*

We now pass from the eighth century to the seventh century before Christ. As we stand upon the bridge spanning the river of time, and linking the two periods together, we may take a backward glance at those momentous years with their fierce struggles and stalwart souls. The northern kingdom had been given the light borne by Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea. She had turned away from it. With growing contumacy, she had rejected the conciliatory overtures made in Jehovah's name, and with few exceptions, her kings were devoid of any deep religious instinct. Syria, that for generations had been Israel's most inveterate enemy, was driven from the stage of world movements when Assyria captured Damascus in 733. This made the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser, virtually master of the nations roundabout. The only power able to dispute his sovereignty at this time was Egypt.

He controlled the activities of his vassals with iron hand, as did his successors. When, therefore, before the eighth century was complete, Hoshea, king of Israel, tried to gain his independence by withholding the payment of tribute, Shalmaneser IV, then ruler

of Assyria, promptly took up arms against him. Samaria held out for three years, but at length, in 722, it capitulated to Sargon, who meanwhile had become king. Infuriated by the stubborn defence that had held his plans in abeyance for so long, he was utterly without mercy. The fall of Samaria involved the whole land in ruin. The bulk of the population, some twenty-eight thousand, was torn away from Palestine, and banished beyond the river Euphrates. The Ten Tribes were lost forever, and the kingdom of Israel was no more. Alien peoples were sent to occupy the deserted country, and a strange admixture of religious cults resulted. This explains the antipathy we find later, and why the Jews had "no dealings with the Samaritans."

Reverting to the history of Judah, we take up the story of Hezekiah. He was one of her noblest monarchs. During his reign, as we have said, the land enjoyed a measure of peace. Unhappily, his revolt against Assyria caused Sennacherib to lay siege to Jerusalem, and only at the cost of stripping even the Temple of some of its treasures, was the invader bought off.

The seventh century had barely begun when Hezekiah died. His son, Manasseh, a boy of twelve, ascended the throne. And by the time the sovereign had reached early manhood, many of the old abuses again flourished throughout the realm. The Asherim and altars dedicated to the local Baalim were re-

stored. The king brought in again the worship of the sun and stars, and Moloch with its bestial observances received official sanction, Manasseh himself causing his son to pass through the fire. Degeneration hung like a cloud over the land. Enchanters and wizards were freely resorted to, and for nearly sixty years the spiritual state of Judah was deplorable.

Amon, who succeeded his father, did not take any steps to remedy this condition of things. He reigned, however, less than two years, for he fell by the hand of an assassin. But expectations rose high when Josiah, the good son of a bad father, became king. Only eight years of age, he could not be expected to do anything at the outset, but his mother, Jedidah, guided the affairs of the nation. Her devotion is beyond praise. Although she is not given a prominent place in the pages of history, she undoubtedly had much to do with shaping the young monarch's life and fitting him for his future work. Her influence and example, coupled with the wisdom of his prophetic advisers, made Josiah the man who could grapple with the peculiar problems of his times. Throughout his reign of thirty-one years, he remained true to his ideals. The reformers who had lost ground during previous reigns were waiting for a leader like him. But immediate action was, unfortunately, out of the question for, at this time, grave events outside Judah were absorbing Josiah's attention.

The Scythian invasion rolled down upon western Asia like a flood, carrying death and desolation with it. Fear smote the nations against which these barbarians came. Palestine was eventually reached, and though Judah remained unscathed, terror overspread the land. The prophets regarded this hostile horde as the avenging agent of Jehovah. At last, when the nation saw that it had been spared the suffering inflicted on surrounding peoples, it turned in thankfulness to the Almighty. A religious revival swept over the land. The spiritually staunch took advantage of this changed mood, and directing the new fervour into practical channels, set out first to restore the Temple which had been seriously damaged by the assaults of past campaigns. Josiah was eighteen when this movement began. It had a far-reaching effect both on himself and the nation's life. While clearing the debris from the Temple site, some workmen discovered the lost Book of the Law. It was at once taken to Hilkiah, the priest. Astounded by the importance of the find, he showed it to Shaphan, the scribe. The Book was, in due course, conveyed to the palace, and when Josiah heard its contents, he could scarcely contain himself. There were precepts that had been entirely disregarded, and prophecies of coming evil against the wayward of which no one seemed cognizant. The king was so perturbed that he sent some of his trusted advisers to the prophetess, Huldah, to seek her guidance in

ordering the kingdom aright. Little comfort was obtained from her, for she declared that the predictions against Jerusalem would be ultimately fulfilled. The only grain of consolation she offered was that Josiah would not live to see the ravishing of the land he loved.

Without delay, Josiah launched a crusade to lead the people back to God. Religion was to be drastically changed, and its abuses removed root and branch. Idol worship was suppressed throughout the realm. Local shrines where heathen practices had blended with homage to Jehovah, were abolished. Worship was centralized again at Jerusalem, the Temple cleansed, and a great Passover held in celebration of that event. These reforms were not carried through with the support of the nation as a whole, for its heart was grossly defiled and its moral stamina depleted. But Jehovah's arm was not shortened. He could not leave His people in their helplessness and folly, intractable though they had often been. So other valorous contenders for the faith, like Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum, took their places in the arena.

# JEREMIAH, THE MAN WHO FAILED

Of the priestly line, he began his prophetic work shortly before King Josiah instituted his reforms, and continued his ministry until the reign of Gedaliah. His period is approximately B.C. 627–587.

## *VII. JEREMIAH, The Man Who Failed*

Men are attracted by the successful; they are repelled by failure. They love the bright and exuberant; the sad and despondent, while perhaps calling forth sympathy temporarily are passed by as quickly as possible. For as Ella Wheeler Wilcox says:

> "Laugh, and the world laughs with you,
> Weep, and you weep alone."

That may account for the limited appeal that Jeremiah, the man who failed, has made to many. Yet, as is often the case, judging by appearances may lead to wrong conclusions. This is a man of undoubted gifts. His outstanding worth is seen as we read the records, for the part he played in the fortunes of Judah, and his unflinching pursuit of the right make him noteworthy. He was what might be called, "A son of the manse." He came of a priestly family in Anathoth, a small town to the northwest of Jerusalem, and his life bears unmistakable traces of his early training. The family possessed some small property in that neighbourhood, and though Jeremiah's father was a priest, tradition suggests that there was also a link with the renowned Abiathar, whom Solomon banished to that place. This would

warrant some degree of permissible pride in such a distinguished ancestor. It helps to explain the deep solicitude for Judah's welfare that marked Jeremiah's work. He was probably chosen to become a prophet while quite a youth, although much importance ought not to be attached to the fact that he refers to himself as a child. That might be his sense of inexperience and incompetency for a mission so momentous. But that the call came early in life is fairly clear. The voices of the former prophets were silent. Hushed were the stirring tones of Isaiah and Micah. Amos and Hosea were only dim memories to most people, even if they were remembered at all. Then was the Word of the Lord to be withheld in times so troublous? That is not God's way. The greater the need, the surer was spiritual assistance if a fitting vehicle could be found for its transmission. That in itself meant inner conflict to a man of Jeremiah's temperament. While he saw the beckoning hand, his own unworthiness seemed an insuperable difficulty. Who was he to aspire to such a position of eminence? He was far from perfect, immature, and unversed in the ways of public service. Moreover, there were others better acquainted with current affairs and who, out of their riper experience, might be able to guide men with surer instinct. Thus, even as Moses did in the wilds of Midian, as Gideon when the angel of God came to him, Jeremiah, consecrated though he was, shrank from the path opening at his feet.

It is generally conceded that no man ought to be in the sacred office unless he cannot keep out. Harm to the cause of God must result if one assumes the robe of the teacher of righteousness while lacking the conviction that such a work has been intrusted to him from above. We recall a fond mother who was ambitious to have her son in the church. "He is an unusual boy, and so clever! The only thing is, that he detests public speaking, and I am afraid that he will never make a preacher. He hasn't any aptitude for it, but it would be such a disappointment to us if our son did not become a minister." If Jeremiah were aware of his deficiencies, he had unquestionably an exalted ideal of the prophet's functions. He felt that that high calling demanded a worthier man. Yet there was the impulse he could not conscientiously ignore. God wanted him. Could he refuse? If Isaiah's experience were, by any chance, known to him, that may have been the deciding factor. Like his distinguished countryman, at length he saw his duty plain, and with unflagging energy, he gave himself to a ministry extending for more than forty years—from B.C. 627 to 587.

It is contrary to the customary order of things, but before painting the portrait let us look at the frame intended for it. In other words, what were the circumstances in which Jeremiah lived? Although he had been at work about five years when Josiah inaugurated his reforms, Jeremiah is not spoken of in

connection with that movement. From that it may be implied that his scope did not then lie beyond his own city. He was soon, however, to come from obscurity. When Necho II, king of Egypt, taking advantage of Nineveh's troubles, tried to annex Palestine, Josiah saw the menace. He brought his army to bar the way of the Egyptians. The campaign was unsuccessful, and Josiah was slain on the field of Megiddo. All seemed lost. His son, Jehoahaz, reigned only three months, when he was deported in chains. The latter's brother, Jehoiakim, then received the crown as a tributary of Egypt. And at that juncture, Jeremiah took the field as a prophet of God. He plainly saw that to quarrel with Babylon could have only one result. Desolation would settle upon the land. So Jehoiakim was restrained from overt action for three years. But it was not without considerable effort on Jeremiah's part. We deduce this from the way the king sought to discredit him.

With the assistance of Baruch, Jeremiah had committed his prophecies and precepts to writing. He then ordered Baruch to take them to the sanctuary, and to read to the worshippers "the words of the Lord in the Lord's house." This created a furore. The news travelled to the palace. Some of the princes then sent for Baruch, bidding him bring the roll that they also might hear what Jehovah had said by Jeremiah. He did so. The message seemed so opportune that they felt the king should be acquainted

with it. They first took the precaution of dismissing Baruch, instructing him to go with Jeremiah to some place of concealment lest harm befall them. And the roll was duly deposited in the chamber of Elishama, the scribe.

When the princes related to Jehoiakim the predictions and policies outlined by the prophet, he commanded that the roll should be read to him. Jehudi was entrusted with this office. It was winter, and a fire was burning on the open hearth before the king. As he listened, his anger became uncontrollable. Snatching the manuscript from the reader's hands, he slashed it with his dagger. Then throwing the fragments on the fire, he watched them burn to ashes. If he imagined he could curb the power of Jehovah in that way, he was mistaken. A man may close his eyes to the light; that does not extinguish the sun. He may thrust from him the counsels of God, close his ears to wisdom's voice; he does not in that way abrogate the divine law. So Jeremiah, under the direction of God, prepared another roll in which the former message, together with further prophecies, was recorded.

At last the time came when, feeling himself strong enough to withhold tribute from Babylon, Jehoiakim took the plunge. This was, in effect, a declaration of independence. It was also an act of defiance which Babylon could not misconstrue, and which she certainly would not overlook. The prophet had seen

it coming. Standing almost alone, he had rebuked the glaring evils and flagrant immorality of the land. He had denounced the pride that, based on superficial reform and a perfunctory regard for God, maintained that He must stand by His people for His honour's sake. It was not so. True covenant-relationship, as the other prophets had affirmed, required fidelity on both sides.

The armed might of Babylon moved steadily towards Jerusalem. King Jehoiakim was slain in the interval, but his son, Jehoiachin, had mounted the throne, and his father's policy had not been reversed. Jerusalem was besieged, and after a reign of only three months, Jehoiachin was deposed, and, with the flower of the nation, carried captive to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner for thirty-seven years.

Zedekiah, his uncle, took the reins of office. He was well-meaning, but weak-willed, easily swayed by the politicians about him, and the last speaker could invariably catch his ear. But Jeremiah, although he had failed to save the former sovereigns from their foolhardiness, continued his work. It had, however, taken another turn. He no longer interceded with God for the deliverance of the people; on the contrary, he seems to have urged them to work out their own salvation by acceding to the demands of Babylon, and by fashioning their national life in accordance with the dictates of the

conqueror. It was all in vain. Jeremiah met with no more success than he had done under previous rulers. Zedekiah revolted from the Chaldean suzerainty. Jerusalem was again encircled by her foes, and suffering fell anew upon the Holy City. The prophet was not inactive, but he was as one crying to the wild seas. And his enemies were of his own race. Accused of being antagonistic to the crown and to the good of the kingdom, reviled and forsaken, he was thrust into a noisome dungeon. His anguish was more mental than physical. He was helpless and yet his people were in the most pitiable plight. "When I kept silence," cried one of another age, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." And so it must have been with Jeremiah. After some time, he was rescued from durance vile by the intervention of an Ethiopian slave, named Ebed-melech. This man, watching his chance, enlisted the help of a few sympathizers. Lowering a rope with a bundle of rags to the unhappy prisoner, who stood deep in slime, he directed him to place the cloths with the cord under his arms and Jeremiah was raised into the light. Zedekiah had in reality been well-disposed towards the prophet and at once he admitted him to the royal presence.

It was too late, however, to divert the calamity from Jerusalem. The siege that had lasted for eighteen months could be no longer withstood. The city was in the last stages of exhaustion. The de-

fences were broken down, the garrison, emaciated and weak, was slain, and the mailed men of Babylon rushed onwards to the palace. Zedekiah's eyes were put out, and he, together with a number of his subjects, gathered for deportation. Jeremiah was amongst these, but evidently some word of his attempts to keep Judah loyal to her overlord was carried to the commander. In appreciation of the prophet's services, he was given the option of staying in his own land or proceeding to Riblah. But his work lay in the place of his fathers. He might accomplish more for God with those who still had the framing of national policy than if he were to go with the conqueror. So he remained, taking up his quarters at Mizpah where, Gedaliah, whom Babylon had made king, had set up his court.

Two months later, Gedaliah was murdered by Ishmael. Johanan, the son of Kareah, headed a number of the people towards Egypt in order to escape the reprisals which Chaldea would be sure to make, and although Jeremiah stoutly protested against the venture, he was seized by these Hebrew zealots, and taken to Egypt. This was "the most unkindest cut of all." To have resolutely opposed this insurrection, and yet to be the companion of rebels, to have spent himself for his country, and still to be forced away from it when he had elected to stand by her through her anxieties, were bad enough. But to feel that he was now unable to save her from

her refractoriness, that no longer could he lift his voice either to warn or protest, must have been hard indeed. His end is shrouded in mystery. Tradition says that he died in Egypt at the hands of his captors. Whether that be so or not, it does not alter the fact that Jeremiah failed. He had spoken, and his words had fallen on the unyielding heart like seed on stony ground. He had laboured without ceasing for his people, and not bread, but a stone, not fish, but a serpent, were his portion.

Turn now from the frame to the canvas. The features are those of a man who is a strange mixture of the visionary and the practical. There is something of the poet in his nature. We notice also the keen eye which perceives the spiritual in the material, that can read parables in the ordinary happenings of life, that can behold the unseen amid the seen. The nostrils denote a sensitive temperament. This is a man who feels acutely every experience through which he may be called to pass. If they are pleasurable, they will yield far more to him than to most; but if, on the other hand, they are sad, he will suffer intensely because of his sympathy, and his faculty for identifying himself with the misery or mistakes of others. The deep lines beneath the eyes and on the brow are evidence that there has been bitter anguish in his lot. The mouth and chin suggest firmness and decision, yet both may be modified, even though his purpose should remain unchanged. All of which is

mere assumption! Not necessarily. We base the description on the self revealed in his pages.

His poetic gifts can be gauged by the haunting rhythm of some of his lines. For example:

"My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (2:13)

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (5:30)

"Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." (8:19–20)

"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." (13:23)

"For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt . . . astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (8:20–22)

The singular symbols he employs to illustrate and enforce spiritual truths suggest that he possessed rare powers of insight and imagination. He sees a vision of an almond tree, which blossoming with fairest flowers in early spring, suggests the possibility

of renewal and beauty if the nation will but repent. The seething cauldron denotes the unrest and hostility prevailing. He takes a new girdle signifying the close bond between Jehovah and His people which, when trust and obedience were forthcoming, held them close to God, and girded the loins for service. The girdle was, however, afterwards placed in a crevice of the rock, and when taken out after the lapse of many days, it was found to be rotten and unserviceable. Thus the effects of disobedience and unbelief were seen upon Judah's relationship with God.

An earthen vessel, hardened by the sun before it was fired, was emblematic of the people's hearts beneath the beams of prosperity. Jeremiah was instructed to take this, and gathering the elders together, to stand in the vale of Hinnom, and there speak of the land's apostasy from Jehovah, the source of its beauty and worth. Its symmetry was indicated by the finished vessel; its frailty, no less than its hardness, by what followed. Taking the vessel in his hands he dashed it down upon the rocks, saying, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again."

The two baskets of figs, one ripe and good, the other rotten and worthless, likewise showed the deterioration of national life. For as Jesus said, "By their fruits shall ye know them." The wine-cup

typified the draught of remorse and retribution which must be drunk by those who set at nought the counsel and compassion of the Highest. While the yoke and fetters which, subsequently, Jeremiah set upon his neck and limbs, were an acted parable of the bondage into which the people were going, with open eyes, in spite of the warnings so long addressed to them. They were sufficiently enlightened to know that God's ways were beneficent, and His paths pleasantness and peace. And while it was the Master who said, centuries afterwards, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," God had not left Himself without witness even in those days. They knew the better course; they declined it to their hurt.

Like the true artist, the whole range of life was Jeremiah's field. He culls striking figures from the fowler snaring birds, the farmer ploughing the fallow soil, and the fisherman with his well-filled net. The hunter in quest of his quarry, the brigand lurking in ambush, the ruthless creditor pursuing his debtor, show the sterner side of life. Wild beasts and birds, trees and fields, the olives stripped by the tempest, and the trailing vine, reveal his genius. While his description of the wide-stretching desert, and the furious hurricane shows that he possessed talent of no mean order. He anticipates Longfellow's memorable lines:

"There is a Reaper, whose name is Death,
And, with his sickle keen,
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,
And the flowers that grow between."

For describing the desolation that should flood the country, he says: "Death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets." That even recalls a well-known passage from John Bright's speech in which he set forth the horror of the Crimean War. "The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one, as when the first-born were slain of old, to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on. He takes his victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor and the lowly, and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal."

And what shall be said of his incomparable analogies derived from the life about him? The most familiar of these is found in Chapter XVIII. The prophet had been brooding over the sins of Judah, and the inevitable consequences of wrong-doing. His heart was sad. His impulse was to get away from everyone and fight this thing out alone. Wandering aimlessly on, perplexed and out of harmony with everything, at last he sat down on a knoll overlooking

the craftsmen's quarters. The hum of industry sounded gently on the air. He could see men in the distance, going about their accustomed work with unhasting feet. Happy were they in their limited lot. They were untroubled by these harassing thoughts. But to him, as the prophet of Jehovah, they meant everything. How could he "justify the ways of God to men" when his own soul was enshrouded by the mists of misgiving? He did not welcome doubt. It haunted him even while he hated it; yet hating it, he could not cast it out, and peace was impossible.

A voice within disturbed his musings. "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words." Should he go? What was the use! Jeremiah was possibly acquainted with the potter. He was a faithful, slow-witted fellow, good at his work, but not particularly intelligent or spiritual. It was unlikely that he would have any comfort to impart to one the windows of whose being had been ever open to the light of heaven. Still he went. It is good to obey the divine impulse, and to walk in the way indicated, even when one may be sure that blessing is improbable. Then God can speak the hidden words of wisdom. It was such a relief to see one engaged in honest industry that the prophet stopped. The potter looked up from his wheel to mutter a word of greeting, but it was only for a moment. He was engrossed by the work before

him. Jeremiah watched the shapeless lump of clay lifted from the kneading-board, and thrust upon the wheel, and as it spun round, he noticed how it was slowly taking shape under the pressure of those skilful hands. There came a sudden ejaculation from the potter. Some fault in the material had arisen, and "the clay was marred in the hand of the potter." The man did not abandon his purpose. He pressed the half-formed vessel down again upon the wheel, perhaps adding water to make it more plastic. Then, with a forward movement of his foot on the lower disc, he set the wheel spinning again, and this time with better results. The formless mass began to take symmetry. Its centre was hollowed out by the deft fingers of the workman. And at length the wheel stopped; the jar was ready to harden in the sun before finally being placed in the kiln. The prophet's interest had, however, passed to something higher and deeper. He had frequently held up a mirror to life, but God had here been showing him a reflection of eternal things. Judah was like that clay, marred in the hand of the heavenly Potter. Browning's petition runs:

> " . . . I need, now as then,
> Thee, God, who mouldest men;
> And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
> Did I—to the wheel of life
> With shapes and colours rife,
> Bound dizzily—mistake my end. . . .

So, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!"

One less purposeful might have discarded the misshapen vessel as useless. God could not do that. His character forbade it. The infinite forbearance of His heart constrained Him to take again the unresponsive material, and fashion it anew. Although Judah might have to pass through still further experiences preliminary to her perfecting, though she might be kneaded like the clay until the requisite plasticity were obtained, God would not be foiled. He would yet shape His people—or at least a remnant of them—to His divine uses.

Glad may the soul be that, notwithstanding its shortcomings, it is "not left in God's contempt apart." On the contrary, He is ever at work through life's varied happenings, seeking to mould life for His divine end. Some such thought must have occurred to the Apostle Paul for he says: "If a man therefore purge himself from these (patent defects), he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." It was this hope which Jeremiah held out to the men of his day. Alas, it had little effect. They were complacent in their self-righteousness. They refused

to face facts. They did not even give credence to the truths portrayed with such a masterly hand. What could be the issue, then, but loss and the hindering of God's good will?

The book is diffuse and far from simple to grasp, but many truths are set forth with perfect clearness. Jeremiah's consciousness of his own and his nation's sinfulness is manifest throughout. While he follows the teachings of some of the earlier prophets, he passes their thought through his own mind. Judah's reprehensible misconduct weighed heavily on him. Had not Jehovah led the people like a flock? They had been only too glad of His protection in times of peril, and to avail themselves of His providing care when in straits. Yet when blessings came thick as autumn leaves they were oblivious to the unseen Benefactor. Jehovah had warned them by His servants; those warnings were discounted. "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Everyone turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." And again, "I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto Me."

Marc Antony might say of the dead Cæsar,

> "Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
> Quite vanquish'd him: then burst his mighty heart."

Nevertheless, God is other than man. He would not abandon His people without reiterated pleadings.

The tenderness in Jeremiah's tones, the wistfulness in his face as with tear-dimmed eyes he speaks in the divine name, were but a hint of the compassions of God. If only the heedless would hear, repentance would not be in vain. Life should have a new start. "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart." "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people."

It follows of necessity that such tremendous truths could not be transmitted by the prophet without his own concept of God being expressed. Though there is slight difference between Jeremiah's views and those of previous prophets, there is undoubtedly deepened knowledge through his own spiritual receptiveness. Jehovah diagnosed the inner maladies of the race. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways." He was not a God amongst many; He was supreme. "There is none like unto Thee, O Lord; Thou art great, and Thy name is great in might." Yet so gracious was He that Jeremiah came within sight of the wondrous Fatherhood of the Almighty. "Thou shalt call Me, my Father; and shalt not turn away from Me." Judah's backsliding should be healed. No

longer need she tremble because of her enemies; the Mighty God would be her refuge and her stay.

The future was fraught with peril. Jeremiah's soul was dark with the shadow of coming events. He saw the land plunging fast to destruction through the obstinacy of its rulers. His message, given though it was by God, achieved nothing. He might, Canute-like, just as well have stood by the shore and bidden the incoming waves stay their progress. His personal faith, however, stood the test. He was positive that God would not disappoint those who confided in Him. All would come right. So although Jeremiah had spent his earlier years in complaining and regret, dragging the people's sins into the light of day, and bemoaning their folly, he came at last, like a barque that has sailed raging seas and then enters the haven, to that calm that nothing disturbs.

Measured by material standards, his goal was unreached. But gauged by those of heaven, did he not achieve fame? For a time, his message missed its mark. His authority was unacknowledged during his lifetime. But the nobility of his character, the lofty motives that animated him, the doggedness he displayed when a man without his convictions might have deserted his post, came to be recognized. The day came when Jeremiah was adjudged a notable addition to "the goodly fellowship of the prophets." By the beginning of the Christian era, he was venerated as "*The Prophet.*" What is more to

the point, through his self-sacrifice, his influence endures.

He reminds us of Brianto, that brilliant but unfortunate young sculptor, who came to an untimely end. Although he had carried off the Prix de Rome, he seldom had any commissions. The genius within, however, he constantly strove to express. In a little, miserable room in Paris, he lived and worked. His ambition was to produce something that would survive long after he was gone, and there he laboured at a statue that was destined to make him famous. He was so desperately poor that only when his model sat for him would he use any coal; the remainder of the day he worked in that fireless room, through the bitter winter days. The statue was almost complete when, one night, remembering the damp clay and its danger from the keen frost, he rose from his poor bed, took off the coverlets, and carefully wrapped them about the figure. Then he lay down again in his clothes. He was missed for a day or two, when a friend in quest of him, went to the studio. There lay the young artist, frozen upon his pallet, while the shrouded work told its own story. In spite of his sacrifice, one arm of the figure had been broken by the frost, and lay upon the floor. In the École des Beaux Arts the bronze figure of Mercury, plucking a thorn from his heel, may be seen. But the right arm is missing. The statue was cast just as the clay form had been found, in order that the

memory of a man who loved his art more than himself might inspire the world with its suggestion of sterling devotion.

Jeremiah enjoyed the rare privilege of serving Judah much as our Lord did the Jerusalem of His day. He emphasized the love God felt for His children, even though they were undeserving. He prefigured the Man of Sorrows who wept over that same city where the prophet had preached without effect. The very symbol of the wine-cup he employed suggests Him who blessed the Cup, making it an emblem of His sacrificial death.

Can the consecrated life be futile? Impossible! None of us, giving allegiance to God, seeking to assuage the griefs of the world, and doing anything in our power to bring it nearer to God, can wholly fail. We may miss much, we may suffer more. But, with the confidence that steadied St. Paul, each can say: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Therefore, the disheartened may rejoice. If life's labours seem ineffectual, or its efforts to aid the world appear fruitless, recall the experiences of this prophet of God, and note this: had he not striven as he did, the quiet dignity and ethereal beauty shining like a halo about the face we have painted, could not have been his. And richer blessings may be ours, for we are Christ's!

## ZEPHANIAH, THE ZEALOUS

A prince of Judah, related to King Josiah. His work began shortly after Jeremiah commenced to prophesy, about B.C. 626.

## *VIII. ZEPHANIAH*

It was during Josiah's reign that Zephaniah began to prophesy. He was, according to his own record, related to the royal house, his genealogy being traced back to Hezekiah. That gives the key to a great deal. Josiah's reformation had failed of complete success, and Zephaniah, the young prince, was in a position to judge accurately the true state of things. Manasseh and Amon had been bad, but the present ruler was very different. He was, however, engrossed with various pressing affairs of the country. The Scythians were causing still much uneasiness, and his internal policy of reform, had had to be left largely to subordinates to carry out in detail. Zephaniah detected subterranean influences at work in the palace. Corruption was rife. Old intrigues were still going on behind the king's back, and vested interests were battling for the mastery. No wonder Zephaniah's soul flamed with indignation. Jeremiah had already commenced his prophetic ministry, when Zephaniah began to prophesy. Except that both were moved by the same high promptings to speak in the name of God to their nation, they had little in common. Jeremiah was of a sympathetic nature. His heart grieved over the misery and shame which

sin entailed. Zephaniah, on the contrary, was pitiless. He saw only the iniquity of the people; there was not, as he viewed the situation, a single redeeming feature in their life. No other writer shows a more intimate knowledge of Jerusalem. He describes its exclusive quarters and the shameful indifference displayed by those who lived there.

What to the prophet was the defiling touch of the heathen was evidenced in the well-dressed princes with their fine raiment of foreign cut and fashion. He might have endorsed the familiar counsel:

> "Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
> But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy,
> For the apparel oft proclaims the man."

The sting lay in the thought, however, that thus apeing those of alien nations, they were disparaging their own. Down by the Fish Gate and in the second quarter, called Maktesh, Zephaniah saw merchants from far Phœnicia plying their trade, and enriching themselves at the cost of his own people. It seemed incomprehensible that there was such a demand for foreign produce, while within its own borders were resources still untapped. The nation was living upon its capital funds. Feasting and folly, perfunctory religious observance and resultant shallowness of character, could terminate in only one way. Jehovah would loose the hounds of righteous retribution. Destruction would stalk through the land.

In this mood, not altogether inexplicable, Zephaniah returned to his abode. To reach his apartment, he had perforce to pass by the palatial homes of other princes, where lights twinkled amid the trees of the gardens, and the haunting music of the dancing-girls, coupled with the strident laughter of the frivolous, smote on his ear. What did they know of their storied past? What did they care for the honour God had placed on the nation in calling it to be His channel of blessing? Nothing! Prophets like Isaiah and Micah had fulminated against the iniquities of rulers and ruled. They heeded not! Warning voices had spoken about "the day of the Lord." It conveyed little to them except that, when that day came, Jehovah would still show clemency and favour to His covenant people. Even in that very hour, Jeremiah had lifted up his voice in earnest entreaty, beseeching the nation to turn from its stupid errors. What had he accomplished? What could arrest the bolt of wrath which human short-sightedness and obstinacy made inevitable?

It was because Zephaniah was so young that he was so intense. He had neither patience nor mercy; perhaps he had not lived long enough to learn sympathy, nor to make any allowance for man's frailty, for that comes only with the years and with a feeling of personal imperfection. In this case, though, perhaps that were justifiable. But he found himself in violent opposition to things as they were, because

his youthful eyes saw things as they might be. He contrasted the actual with the ideal. A people so richly blessed, so signally favoured, so mightily protected, had shown the most callous disregard of the divine will. Its heart was the heart of an ingrate. Zephaniah felt this so acutely that he might have said:

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude."

What then could Jehovah do, being the All-Holy, with those who had trampled His commands underfoot? One of Zephaniah's most vivid metaphors answers the question. "I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees." The allusion is to the old custom of purging a house of leaven before the Passover. The head of the family was required to inspect the dwelling with a lighted candle in order that no leavened bread might remain. And the prophet envisaged the savage conqueror, forcing his way into every place of concealment, that none might escape the vengeance of that God whose instrument he was. In vain would the men of Judah, like those described in the Apocalypse, say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the

throne . . . for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Their disobedience would receive condign punishment. Zephaniah did not anticipate for a moment that his words would bring about any sudden conversion from evil to good. It was too late for that. They were settled on the lees. Another striking figure is utilized. When new wine was bottled in the skins it was left standing for a given time in order that it might mellow, and gain both body and colour. But if, by any chance, it were left too long on the lees, it became muddy and rapidly deteriorated. The phrase became a synonym for the slothful and those who were either unwilling or unable to avail themselves of life's chances of improvement. This was the condition of Judah, and it might well move an angel to tears. A lamentable apathy hung over the land like a pall. Their plight was not due to ignorance—that might have engendered pity; it was due to insensate disbelief in God's concern for man's welfare. "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil."

Although the prophet knew his task was destined to be fruitless from the start, he must deliver his own soul. Whatever the censure he might incur, it should not be said that he had failed to lift a warning voice. "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against

the fenced cities, and against the high towers." Judah would stumble in the streets like a blind man. Beaten, tormented, buffeted by her foes, she would be unable to escape their violence because her spiritual sight was withdrawn. She might proffer bribes of silver and gold; she could not give enough to a foe who was bent on taking all. The princes of the people had proved ravenous as lions, ready to devour the weak. The judges who ought to have stood for unimpeachable integrity were like wolves. Prophets had misled the and with their vain boasts of security, even as the priests had polluted the springs at which the thirst of the inner man might have been quenched. It is not surprising, therefore, that the way of retribution must be trodden. Not on Judah only, but also on the whole earth, would judgment come. Though the sons of Jacob had the fuller light and, therefore, the larger responsibility, Cush, Moab, Philistia, and Ammon, named in Zephaniah's indictment, possessed in varying degree some knowledge of what the world's sovereign Ruler required. Even Assyria, the supposedly invulnerable, should not escape His punitive purpose, for Nineveh would be laid waste, and fearsome dread would appal the guilty throughout the earth.

A point as interesting as it is important is brought out. Man's beliefs about God largely determine his conduct. What other explanation can we offer for Judah's attitude? When a noble idea of the Supreme

filled the mind of the nation under the régime of the earlier prophets, the whole tone of life was raised. Jehovah was seen to be the sole object of human adoration and trust. His glory flamed from sun and star. By Him all things were created, and His hand sustained every living thing. Moreover, it was not simply that He was great in power; He was matchless in character. His love and tenderness called for unceasing thankfulness, even as His beneficent commands required obedience. Then a grave error found lodgment. It spread through succeeding generations. The long-suffering of the Almighty was confused with weakness. The sacrificial ritual, if duly observed, provided a substitute for right-living. And in any case, was not God held by indissoluble ties to His people? Nothing but good could therefore be their portion; the rest of mankind were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." Thus a base concept issued in a low standard of individual behaviour.

We pursue the matter a little further. Zephaniah's view of Jehovah was entirely at variance with that of his nation. With the partiality of youth, he saw only one phase of the truth. To him, God was the terrible One, whose resentment at the violated word and the obstinacy of Judah must find outlet. Nothing could mitigate the guilt of the wrong-doer, argued Zephaniah. There was, therefore, no tolerance in his own bosom. With unmeasured scorn, he called down punishment on the sins of his day. All were guilty

of the basest ingratitude. They had done despite unto the living God. There was no difference between the culpability of one people and another. The entire earth merited the rod of God's avenging hand.

Zephaniah was not a man for whom the present generation would have much affection. He was too rigorous in his demands, too austere. But it must be granted that to serve and save the race, more than condemnation is necessary. It needs direction more than denunciation. Criticism may be caustic; it must be constructive. And to Zephaniah came that fuller light, hence the epilogue. It was as though, while the Almighty assented to the portrayal of judgment which the prophet had made, He could not permit one side of His divine nature to be emphasized to the exclusion of the other. There is mercy as well as might to take into account. The illuminating Spirit brought a heavenly beam to lighten this gloomy soul, shadowed with the shame of national degeneration. Thus, while there is no hint of the Messianic Prince whereby other prophets were gladdened, there is at least the gleam of future good for a remnant. The meek, endeavouring to keep their feet in the ways of peace, shall know the saving power of God. Joy shall displace mourning, and tranquillity shall follow the tempest. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing."

While some see in this epilogue traces of a later hand, we find no inconsistency in the prophet's change of key. Jesus Christ spoke of the love of God as no other could. He showed men the tragic severance that sin entails, and proved that all perverse behaviour brings grief to the divine Father. In fadeless colours, He painted His canvas of the erring Prodigal, drawn back by the magnetism of a love that would not let him go, and, truly, Zephaniah's words were amply illustrated by the gladness that home-coming brought. But Christ went further. While He reproached the self-satisfied Pharisees, He had infinite pity for the mistaken, marred, and misshapen lives about Him. It was not by hard words that He sought to deal with their hurt and direct them to ways of purity and holiness. It was by His understanding and compassion. He loved them, not for what they were, but for what they might become. "To know all is to forgive all" said a famous Frenchman. Christ knew the weakness, the thwarted strivings, the remorse and dejection that repeated falls before temptation mean. And without condoning the sin, He yet commiserated with the sinner. While Zephaniah bore testimony to the inflexible uprightness of the divine character, and the invariable results of wickedness, and while his message is peculiarly needed in our modern age, yet Christ's full-orbed presentation of One who is Holy Love is required even more.

If man's beliefs about God, therefore, be true—that is, if they are based on the revelation of Jesus—we need not fear that the evils of the world will go on unrestrained. Men cannot continue in sin that grace may abound. On the contrary, if they comprehend this basal fact clearly, they will also see that what works havoc in life brings pain and is an offence to Him who is primarily interested in the good of His children. Thus stripped of its glamour, robbed of its appeal, sin shall no longer exercise dominion over man. But with glad acceptance of the grace that Jesus offers, with repudiation of its past errors, the regenerate heart will choose those things making for restoration and peace. Through Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, it shall find that path of the just which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

## NAHUM, THE CRITIC OF NINEVEH

His date is about B.C. 608, Assyria being at the height of her power. She had subdued Thebes, and her exultant pride is the basis of Nahum's severe condemnation.

## *IX. NAHUM*

If Tennyson be right that "Words, like Nature, half reveal and half conceal the soul within," we can read the book of Nahum with some likelihood that the man will not be wholly hidden. At first sight, concealment of himself would seem to have been decided on. It has been successful in the main. Beyond the fact that Nahum calls himself "the Elkoshite," a term practically devoid of meaning for us, the personal has been excluded. There is no narration of the way the call came to him, as in the case of Amos; nothing about his admission to the prophetic line, like that of Isaiah; no hint of the trials consequent on his following the divine direction. Still, if Cuvier could give the probable dimensions and a general description of some extinct mammal from a single bone, we need not forego the attempt to limn the prophet because the materials are so meagre.

The description, Elkoshite, can be disposed of as yielding little information. The Old Testament affords no clue to the site of Elkosh. There is a village named Elkush, some twenty-four miles from where Nineveh stood. Nahum's reputed tomb is there. But interesting and plausible though the claims of this place may be, the tradition associating him with

it cannot be traced earlier than the sixteenth century. A passage from Jerome places the prophet's home in Galilee, while other stories link him with Judah. The latter seem more likely. His sympathies were with the southern kingdom, and his outlook is decidedly that of one who knew the vicissitudes through which it passed. Apart from all this, however, his abode must remain undetermined.

The second half of Tennyson's statement may now be considered. If a man's words reveal as well as conceal, there is a chance that, although carefully eliminating private details, the man may stand silhouetted against the lurid prophecies he painted. There is always the possibility of self-revelation. No matter how skilfully we may camouflage our position, personality expresses itself. The tones of the voice, the look in the eyes, some unguarded act when vigilance has been momentarily relaxed or the mask laid aside, will unveil the soul within. It is true of Nahum.

We see the man reflected in his thoughts about Jehovah. God is the sole Ruler of the universe. While others had dealt with this side or that of the divine nature, Nahum declares His sovereignty and strength. God is jealous of His holy name, recompensing the wrong-doer, and prepared to vent His wrath upon His adversaries. Although slow to anger, and so forbearing that His proffered forgiveness might be scorned by some, yet He would by no means clear

the guilty and headstrong. The fact of His omnipotence is beyond controversy. "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry. . . . The mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at His presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein."

That concept presented a necessary corrective to the lax views of the divine justice then prevailing. It also indicates that Nahum was a man of deep spirituality and keen intuition. His exalted views of God shaped his thought. We, therefore, gain an idea of the man's fitness to be the mouthpiece of the Almighty. While he could ask, "Who can stand before His indignation, and who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?", while he pointed out that "His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him," that was not all. Lest the heart were overwhelmed by the severity of the divine correction, Nahum comforts those who, though palpably imperfect, still ought to do God's will. And from his enlightened soul comes the word, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

The prophet was keenly observant. The world about him was a book of symbols lying ready to his hand for the enrichment of his message. Reference has already been made to the whirlwind and the

storm, the clouds and the sea, the soaring mountains and the hills shaken by the goings of God, the latter almost an anticipation of a later seer who said:

> "The hills are shadows, and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go."

A turgid river in flood typifies the destruction of the wicked. Like tangled thorns, the defences of Nineveh might serve for a time to keep the avenger afar, but as dry stubble they should ultimately be consumed. Those who had plundered Israel, like men stripping the vine of its fruit, shall in turn be despoiled. Nineveh, the vainglorious, that had been stagnant as a pool of water, shall pass out of existence. With swift transition the prophet describes this centre of cruelty and oppression as "the dwelling of the lions . . . where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid. The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey." Yet, certain as the night precedes the day, Nahum prophesied that violence would beget punishment, and wrong-doing its just reward. As fruit shaken from the fig-trees, Nineveh should fall to her adversaries. Like the canker-worm and locusts, "as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee

away," so the military prowess of Assyria should be dissipated.

This brings us to the purpose of the book. Judah had suffered intensely at the merciless hands of Assyria. Nineveh, the capital, is used as a synonym for the entire nation. And although there were some godly men of that age who felt that Jehovah was no longer interested in Judah's welfare, or if He were, He was powerless to restrain the ferocity and spoliation which marked Assyrian aggression, Nahum was convinced that neither was the case. Nineveh was at the zenith of her power and splendour. The earth rang with the shouts of her mailed men as they sacked cities and enslaved peoples. But could she defy Jehovah with impunity? Could the moral law be set at nought indefinitely? Nahum's reply is set forth in his inspired writings. Appearances to the contrary, God had not abdicated nor had His laws become inoperative. Sentence is already pronounced; it might take time to carry it out, but judgment would inevitably fall upon the ruthless oppressor of the nations. In spite of her wealth, the display of martial power, the strategy of her monarchs and statesmen, she should be overtaken by the righteous anger of the Highest. Just as the ancient city of Thebes had fallen before Assyria's attack, so she herself would be deprived of the domination she enjoyed. And the great Assyrian empire, so menacing and formidable, would become an object of derision in the earth.

All this seemed so improbable to the sceptical, if weary, heart of that day that it verged on the absurd. To the casual observer, the facts were against the prophet's words being fulfilled. Egypt had been subdued. Cyprus and Phœnicia were under tribute. Judah had long worn the yoke of the tyrant. And none who dared to question Assyria's authority appeared on the horizon. That did not, however, exclude Jehovah from the sphere of action.

> "Careless seems the great Avenger; history's
> pages but record
> One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old
> systems and the Word;
> Truth for ever on the scaffold, wrong forever
> on the throne,
> Yet that scaffold sways the future."

This is actually the case. Because He is unvarying in character, because He ever keeps faith with His people, because justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne, God must act. Even though He may employ human agents as His instruments, the purpose is still divine. The prophet saw further than any unaided prevision could ensure.

A combined policy on the part of those who had been humiliated by the Assyrian conquerors brought about the very things Nahum had foretold. The death of Assurbanipal, the detested sovereign, brought the hour to strike for freedom. Babylon rose in revolt, to be followed by Egypt. The Medes, now

welded into a potent nation, attacked Nineveh. They were temporarily repulsed, while the Babylonian rising was likewise suppressed. Nabopolassar, who had been set over Babylon by his Assyrian lord, consolidated the kingdom. After fifteen years he too rose against his master's rule. Forming a compact with several nations that had long been tributary to Assyria, Nabopolassar headed the conspiracy. Egypt, Media, and Persia, hoisted the standard of liberty. Other peoples joined them against the common foe. Not so Josiah, king of Judah, as we have already pointed out. With admirable if mistaken fealty to his Assyrian overlord he resisted the rebel forces, and died in the battle of Megiddo. Meanwhile, the enemy pressed on and surrounded Nineveh. At first, they were driven back. Then reinforcements came and the city was again attacked. The siege lasted for two years. The defenders were valiant, manning the ramparts with undaunted bravery. But a new foe, against which they were powerless, had to be reckoned with. The river Tigris, overflowing its banks, undermined and finally swept away a large section of the city walls that had for so long resisted the besiegers.

When the flood subsided, they crossed the river, and poured through the gap into the city. Then the dire prediction of Nahum was fulfilled. Let him speak for himself. "The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet; the chariots

flash with steel in the day of his preparation, and the spears are shaken terribly. The chariots rage in the streets, they jostle one against another in the broad ways: the appearance of them is like torches, they run like the lightnings. . . . The noise of the whip, and the noise of a rattling of wheels; and prancing horses, and jumping chariots; the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, and the glittering spear; and a multitude of slain." Unable to escape from the grip of his implacable enemies, the Assyrian king gathered the women of his household into the palace. This was set on fire, and there they perished with the sumptuous glory of Nineveh, the effete.

The date of Nahum's prophecy can be fixed with a fair degree of accuracy. It was certainly after the fall of No-amon, or Thebes, because the writer alludes to that event as one that is familiar to his readers. "Art thou better than No-amon?" Here the work of the excavator is of value. From the cuneiform records we learn that shortly after the death of Tirhakah, ruler of northern Egypt, Thebes was conquered by Assyria. A large number of people were captured and transported by the victor. This took place about B.C. 664, thus fixing the first date. Further excavations in Babylon have brought to light a stele of Nabonidus. The inscription informs us that the king of the Umman-manda people, or the Medes, were bidden by Marduke, the god of Babylon, to avenge the insults offered to him by the Assyrians. The

Medes are represented as having wreaked the fury of this god upon Nineveh, and that would be about B.C. 606. It is between these two points that Nahum wrote, and the generally accepted date of his work is about fifty years before the Assyrian capital fell. The events took place as he foreshadowed, but the implications of Nahum's message are still noteworthy. Whenever a mighty nation, becoming rich and powerful by violating the principles of justice, freedom, and right, appears on the stage of history, the same thing has been seen. The empires of the Cæsars, of Charlemagne, of Napoleon, had the elements of decay at their cores even in the hour of their brutality and bloodshed, and their end was inevitable. More modern instances could be cited. They exemplify the necessity for Nahum's warnings. They give new force to Kipling's word:

> "For heathen heart that puts her trust
> In reeking tube and iron shard,
> All valiant dust that builds on dust,
> And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
> For frantic boast and foolish word,—
> Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord."

So, in some measure self-revealed, we see this prophet of the fearless and resolute soul. His solemn realization of the divine glory gives his message dignity and force. His quick imagination, his poetic fire and intuition, his use of symbol and imagery, cause him to rank high among the prophets

of the past. But the unalterable validity of truth enables him, as a herald of the Almighty, to speak to every age. It is righteousness that alone exalteth a nation. And only in conformity to the revealed will of God can either a people or an individual find abiding blessing and peace. Right, not might, alone makes for greatness and strength.

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## JONAH, THE VACILLATING

His commission, at first declined, was afterwards carried out. It was also concerned with the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. The book is inserted at this point to illustrate Nahum's prophecy against the city.

## *X. JONAH*

One of the most impressive paintings of George Frederick Watts is his "Jonah." The prophet, as depicted by the artist, has reached Nineveh, the seat of Assyrian luxury and licentiousness, and verily it was a mighty city. Its circumference was three days' journey, that is, about sixty miles around. Its architecture, its busy streets, its numerous traders, and its daintily-adorned women would have impressed the mind of God's servant but for one thing: where before he had wavered, he must now stand firm. He was no longer his own. He was not there to gratify mere curiosity. He must be true to his mission. So against a background of sculptured marble, we see the lithe form of Jonah. Dressed in his peasant's garb, he looks somewhat odd, but his face instantly rivets the gaze. His eyes flash. His arms are uplifted menacingly. One can almost see the torrent of vehement words rushing from his lips as he combines censure and criticism of the degenerate capital.

The faces of his auditors are hidden, but we can imagine them. Terror-stricken, they look aghast at this strange preacher. There is no tone of mercy in his voice, no hint of sorrow. They deserve all that

a holy God may visit on them. Possibly, they realize that, but it does not move Jonah to relent. The unwilling bearer of a message, it is not for him to pity those on whom the wrath of Jehovah had come. So compassion does not enter into his reckoning.

This is the figure, fiery and forceful, we wish to set in the forefront of this study. The man and the service he rendered have been obscured by the controversies raging around his name. "This is the tragedy of the book of Jonah," quotes Sir George Adam Smith, "that a book which is made the means of one of the most sublime revelations of truth in the Old Testament should be known to most only for its connection with a whale." We purpose, therefore, focussing attention upon the mission with which the prophet was charged.

Although the book was not written until about B.C. 301, we insert the story of Jonah at this point to illustrate still further the prophecy of Nahum. Our main concern, however, is with the warning he was sent to proclaim to Nineveh. Why, in face of the implacable hostility and lust of conquest that characterized Assyria, God sent an envoy of grace to such a nation must have puzzled the Hebrew people. But we are in a position to know that God's calm forbearance goes far beyond the limits man would set. "He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and

live." But recalling Nahum's admonishment of Nineveh we can likewise see that, Jonah's counsels treated with contempt, grave consequences were to be expected.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." This was the command issued to Jonah, the reluctant envoy. It can readily be conceived why he resented it. He was fully conversant with Assyria's heartless despotism. Her vile treatment of smaller nations had made them weep bitter tears and ooze blood in their agony. And he loved his own land too well to carry a call to repentance to a people so grossly unjust. He inwardly rebelled; the duty was declined. So hastening to Joppa, he found a ship about to sail to Tartessus, in distant Spain. He was the only passenger and, in view of what afterwards happened, it is more than likely that the crew had their suspicions that he was a fugitive of some kind. Before the voyage had well begun, a great storm sprang up. Sailors are proverbially superstitious, and here we see them appealing to their gods for help. Then as the vessel laboured in the tempestuous sea, they jettisoned part of the cargo to lighten the ship. Jonah was lying exhausted and tortured by fear below deck. The chances are that he was also in the throes of seasickness, for where the sailors were afraid, a landsman would scarcely be at ease. Sternly, the master of the vessel spoke to him.

"What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."

The fury of the gale had not abated. The crew's dread of the unseen is again made evident. What could be the meaning of this sudden squall? They demanded an explanation. It must be connected in some manner with the unknown passenger. Casting lots, they contrived that the stranger should be the victim. A confession was extorted from him, for in his extremity he saw that he could not flee from either God or man. And just as when trouble comes our friends of a day are inclined to throw us over, the sailors flung him into the sea.

In the depths of despair, the recalcitrant man is brought to see how vain is human self-will, no matter how one may try to excuse it. The way of submissive acceptance of God's will is second only in point of satisfaction to glad acquiescence. And that Jonah began to perceive. With fine appropriateness, the narrator puts a prayer of penitence, framed from the Psalms, in the lips of his hero. That cry is heard. Jonah is delivered. And once more, this time to a renewed and humbled heart, the command is given. "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." That is the true warrant of every servant of God. It were presumption to face one's fellows as a self-appointed ambassador. But it is worse to allow the modern

craze for novelty, the demand for preaching that will tickle the ear of the groundlings, to render obsolete the office of God's prophet and rob the message of its divine authority.

Thus Jonah, something as Watts painted him, is found in the populous capital of Assyria. His appearance must at the outset have excited some amused comment. Truly, this unknown fellow, in his uncouth attire, his drawn face, lighted up with burning eyes, betokening urgency and sincerity, was a novelty. Who was he? What was his business? The leisurely buyers in the bazaars looked away from the chaffering merchants in wonderment, as the gaunt figure stalked by. Men of war jeered noisily as he passed. The curious onlookers, their numbers swelling as they followed him, helped still further to awaken curiosity. But unmindful of them, Jonah took his course towards the open square of the city. All the way, the impression made by the magnificence about him had been deepening. The imposing buildings, the crowded thoroughfares, the flashing accoutrements of armed men, and the wealth and ostentatious display which greeted him on every hand, had at first filled his heart with astonishment. Then indignation swept over him. Assyria had grown rich and powerful, but how? Robbery and insensate greed gave the answer. She had taken what she would; she had held it because she could. None dared to resist her imperious

demands. And thus, in defiance of every law except that of self-interest and advancement, she had secured a place of unquestioned eminence.

The hour brought the man! There, with the eager multitude anxious to learn what strange matters were afoot, Jonah took his stand. His voice, vibrant with passion, yet decisive as becomes one whose word came from Jehovah, hushed the milling mob into rapt attention. First deploring his commission, indicting the wrongs inflicted on the helpless and the iniquitous acts which had caused the name of Assyria to be abhorred, he poured forth his invective without restraint. The uplifted arms, then the fingers seemingly clutching the throat of some invisible foe, eyes that flashed defiance, made him a figure of wrath. No longer diffident and cowardly, he spoke as one inspired by the Almighty. The sound of his voice went echoing through the counting-houses of the merchants as they looked up from their books. It penetrated the places of worship where venerable priests stopped in their barren devotions to the gods, aware that this preacher had authority they never possessed. It rang through the painted halls of pleasure where thoughtless crowds sipped the wine of indolence or snatched at the gauzy wings of voluptuousness. Faces paled beneath their artificiality and the careless suddenly awoke to a solemn truth. Woe! Woe to the mighty city of emperors! The hour of reckoning draweth near. The cup is full to

overflowing—that cup of poignant remorse which the proud nation must drain to the dregs!

The news reached the palace where in regal magnificence the king sat upon his throne. What could this mean? His foes had licked the dust before his unconquered hosts. Who then dare pronounce judgment or call him to account? A voice within seemed to say: "There is One who is mightier than thou. He is the King of the whole earth, whose name is Holy. How then wilt thou justify thy ways of wickedness and bloodshed before Him?" Then like mighty thunders sounded the sentence of the heavenly Judge: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

For a moment, the mass about Jonah stood as though stunned. Then terror seized the populace. How could this catastrophe be staved off? There must surely be some way! A fast was ordered, and sackcloth, in token of humiliation and repentance, was enjoined. These were not the mutterings of a demented man, nor the whirling threats of an irresponsible fanatic. It was the word of God. The monarch divesting himself of his royal robes, and casting the ashes of shame on his head, followed the example of his people. A proclamation rang from the towers and city ramparts, endorsing the edict of the elders. "And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor

beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: Let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" And that wicked nation, now repentant and vowing restitution, was spared.

At first sight, this would seem to be the object of Jonah's preaching. There is nothing more gratifying to the man who has spoken in God's name than to find his words have carried conviction and borne fruit in changed lives. But Jonah was a man of limited vision. Bigoted and insular in his outlook, he took it as a personal affront that chastisement had been withheld. Was it that he felt himself discredited by the non-fulfilment of his threats? The test of the true prophet had been defined in Deuteronomy as follows: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him" (XVIII:22). Destruction had not come. God had not poured out the vials of His anger as Jonah had predicted. What then was the inference? That such a warning was unauthorized because unfulfilled?

Allowing for the inevitable after-effects following

a time of mental anguish and strain, we cannot eliminate the element of childish petulance and pique. Like Elijah, he felt the futility of his task and begged Jehovah to take away his life. It may have been that, surrounded as he was by a hostile nation whose fears he had roused to the last degree, Jonah believed he was in dire peril. Revenge would be swift and inescapable. We again turn for a sidelight on this to Hall Caine's *The Christian.* John Storm, another stern prophet of righteousness, had inveighed against the godlessness, the senseless extravagance and vice, about him, until people began to look for the sure visitation of God. The preacher's words were misconstrued into the immediate ending of the world and the day of judgment. Some went so far as to fix the time. The churches were thronged with suppliants. Men and women by the thousand knelt in the streets. Then as the hours passed and a new day came, with the glint of the rising sun, and the fresh breeze of morning, the pent-up passions of the people broke their barriers. Storm was assailed as an arrant deceiver, and by the hands of those he had tried to help he was mercilessly stoned to death.

Jonah's discontent due to the divine clemency is met with gentle raillery. "Doest thou well to be angry?" It is useless to employ direct argument with a disgruntled man. For the time being, he is neither normal nor reasonable. So under the analogy of the gourd, where Jonah had found temporary shelter from

the blistering sun, God reveals how irrational His servant had become. And the divine voice avers, "I have pity on Nineveh." In that sentence lies the substance of the book. It was a revolutionary idea to the prophet's mind; it was a new concept of God. No more a tribal deity, nor the exclusive possession of any one nation no matter how highly favoured it might be, God stood revealed as the "Creator and Preserver of all mankind." The universality of the Gospel which Christ was to bring to the race was here dimly foreshadowed. The boundless sympathies of the Father's heart were here placed on record.

Moreover, we can see the value of this story of Jonah when, in the fourth century before Christ, it was written in the form of a Midrash. Dr. S. R. Driver defines a Midrash as an "imaginative development of a thought or theme suggested by Scripture, especially a didactic or homiletic exposition, or an edifying religious story." It became a popular and forceful vehicle for conveying spiritual truth in a concrete and unforgettable way. Yet, granting liberty for the use of the imagination, and for a graphic presentation of truth, that does not displace Jonah as a historic figure. Because Longfellow tells the story of Paul Revere's ride, in poetic fashion, is the fact thereby rendered invalid? Because Tennyson describes the charge of the fearless Light Brigade at Balaclava, with hyperbolic references to "the

gates of death" and "the jaws of hell," must we dismiss the whole thing as fictitious? The thoughtful will see the bearing of this on the story of Jonah.

But, we repeat, the main message of the book must stand clear above controversial details; so must the man. Over against the narrow prejudice of that early day, set the breadth of God's compassion and the profound mercy He proffers to the penitent. All men, whatever their time or clime, are His children. Their sin is God's sorrow, their salvation His concern. And the Book is intended to inculcate worthier views of God and man by removing the exclusiveness of Jewish thought, and the idea that grace was the sole possession of the covenant people. Genuine repentance, issuing in a forsaking of sinful ways, leads to forgiveness even in foreign nations. And that, not punishment, is Jehovah's object. Nor is the figure of Jonah himself without suggestiveness. He is a type of his race. Intolerant towards others outside the chosen nation, he is unwilling to allow for the limited light they may possess. Imperfect himself, he is impatient with the failings he detects in them, and while he needs and receives pardon for his own defection, he grudgingly admits the right of others to share the love so freely bestowed upon him. On the other hand, he plainly indicates that no divinely-given tasks can be lightly disregarded. "The path of duty is the way to glory." Only in following God's behests, in facing the opportunities that come

to us, can we find satisfaction. It is not for us to complain about the Father's patience, long-suffering, and graciousness. As Robert Louis Stevenson says: "Purge out of every heart the lurking grudge. Give us grace and strength to forbear and to persevere. Offenders, give us the grace to accept and to forgive offenders. Forgetful ourselves, help us to bear cheerfully the forgetfulness of others." Like St. Paul, obedient to the call, it matters not whether events turn out as we expect, or whether our plans are overruled by a higher law, to be faithful hour by hour is all that God requires. Resolute when the path is arduous, brave and determined when the sphere assigned is uncongenial, we may further the work of the Almighty. And through His sufficient help, each may be like Browning's hero:

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

# OBADIAH, THE ANTAGONIST OF EDOM

While it is difficult to assign this work to a definite date, modern exploration enables us to grasp the purport of Obadiah's message.

## *XI. OBADIAH*

There is nothing more deplorable than fraticidal strife. Its results to the immediate parties, as well as to those enmeshed by the dispute, are disastrous. And the classic instance is that of Esau and Jacob. Although from the biblical narrative, the two brothers were afterwards reconciled, the feud between their descendants went on. Generation after generation saw bitterness fomented without reason. The memory of an ancient wrong was perpetuated. Petty meanness and open hostility marked Edom's attitude towards Israel. It was evidently the tribe's policy to make life as trying and progress as difficult as it could for the privileged people of Israel.

On the journey to Canaan, under Moses' leadership, the Edomites had refused a passage through their territory. Later on, there had been hard fighting between them and King Saul. David took stern measures against them, as did Solomon. But no chance of revolt was allowed to pass, and rigorous repression served only to widen the gulf between the two peoples. In the days of Jehoshaphat, there was a renewal of hostilities, Moab and Ammon forming a triple alliance with Edom to invade Judah. Then, under Amaziah's punitive hand, at a subsequent

time, Edom suffered a crushing blow. Petra was taken, and a large number of warriors slain. Still unsubdued and implacable, the tribe cherished its sum of unpaid scores, and hatred lived on. When active opposition was impracticable, they made the lot of their neighbours harder and their burden heavier, by taunts and jeers when calamity fell. This opens up the meaning of the prophecy. While the writer is the avowed antagonist of all who wage war on the chosen of God, he directs his missiles particularly at the Edomites. The displeasure of the Almighty was bound to rest upon the persecutors of His people. But for Judah's heartening, the prophet foretold that justice would one day prevail, and the star of God's people would again be in the ascendant. That much is comparatively plain. There are, however, points regarding both the book and its writer somewhat difficult to settle. If the first section of the work (1–14) refers to Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem and its subsequent fall, that would fix the date as B.C. 587. Edom loudly exulted over the humiliation of her neighbour. For one thing, Judah's captivity gave free access to a well-cultivated stretch of territory. For another, Edom's love of loot found satisfaction. But, not least as she regarded it, the pride of those whom she hated was trampled in the dust of defeat. Secure herself in the stronghold of Petra, she could laugh at the evils that, like a devastating fury, had overtaken the royal house of David.

This arrogance, this unfeeling frame of mind towards human distress, even though Judah deserved the recompense of her sins, roused Obadiah to voice his protests. God had no favourites even though Israel had been chosen and Esau rejected. Evil must bring forth its bitter fruits. The law of right is never abrogated, and for Edom, as well as the stricken Judah, the scourge was prepared. The supplications of the tyrant-ridden, calling for deliverance, had not fallen in vain upon the divine ear. The supposed friends on whom Edom had been depending would fail, and her alliances melt like snow beneath the sun. Her rocky retreat would, instead of proving impregnable, be a trap in which she would be caught. "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord. If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? If the grape-gatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes? How are the things of Esau searched out! how are his hidden things sought up! All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border; the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee;

they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee; there is none understanding in him."

Modern exploration has thrown a flood of light on this passage. Edom's territory ran from the Dead Sea to the Elamitic Gulf. It was a wild, mountainous stretch, described in the Scriptures as "Mount Seir" and also "the mount of Esau," but the valleys were fertile and the crops good. Her resources were, however, largely supplemented by the predatory habits of the tribe. Raids on peaceful neighbours were frequent. Thus reprisals had always to be expected, and to guard against them, Edom had carved out a city of rock, a fastness which few foemen could enter and fewer still leave alive.

Without exaggeration, Petra is one of the wonders of the world. Strabo, the ancient historian, described it as a city enclosed by huge boulders in the midst of a desert waste, but strangely enough with an abundant water supply. It stood on the great caravan route leading north to the Red Sea, and became, therefore, a trading centre. Eventually its existence and even its site were forgotten, and only during the past century have its wonders been rediscovered. Surrounded by massive cliffs, some of them rising almost perpendicularly seven hundred feet, the city is approached by a narrow ravine, terminating in a gorge where two horsemen can scarcely ride abreast. Naturally this could be easily defended against attack. Through the defile, how-

ever, the land widens out, and the mind is amazed by the fine buildings still standing in a marvellous state of preservation. The pink stone is backed by the deep purplish hue of the cliffs. But the uniqueness of the buildings is in this: they are not made of quarried stone, but carved out of solid rock. Of course, some of them belong to a later day than that of Obadiah. The treasury of Pharaoh, for example, is attributed to the Emperor Hadrian, who visited the vicinity in A.D. 131. With its elaborate façade comprising two rows of columns, its statues, and lofty chambers, it is unparalleled. There is also a huge semicircular theatre, with thirty-three tiers of seats accommodating about three thousand spectators. And not far away are the remains of a heathen temple, with places for sacrifice and tombs by the hundred, rock-hewn like the city itself.

This imposing sight, even allowing for a long period of development, conveys some idea of the Edomite stronghold of which Obadiah wrote. While Nature reared those stupendous defences, and man availed himself of the retreat they provided, human ingenuity and resource could not indefinitely combat the divine will. Edom should be repaid in her own coin. "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head." In his patriotic fervour, Obadiah spoke without restraint. But there was more than resentment stirred by the wrongs of his countrymen in his heart. If we would

fathom his message we must gain his viewpoint. Edom's persecution of Judah is not, unhappily, an isolated instance. The strong have exploited the weak; prosperity has often derided adversity. The unscrupulous have pointed the finger of scorn at the trials of those loyal to principle. But that was, in the prophet's thought, and is as history proves, only a temporary phase. The universe is framed on the law of righteousness. If, to use the poetic mode of the old writer, "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," so the forces of heaven are marshalled on the side of those who resist evil. Milton could cry out in aggrieved tones regarding the massacre of Piemont:

"Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold:
Even them who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in Thy book record their groans
Who were Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven."

With steadying effect the word comes echoing down the corridors of time "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Obadiah believed in the inflexible integrity of God, but also in the mercy that seasons justice. That

prompted him to affirm, as the other prophets had done, that restitution would be made to Judah in God's good time. "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance . . . and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." Misfortune and distress might first harass her. She might be dispossessed, but in the good providence of God restoration would come, and in the enjoyment of His favour she would again know the blessings of obedience. Aspiration and national pride, now but a few glowing embers, would be fanned again into flame. "The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble." The eyes dimmed with long watching should be gladdened with the light of hope, and defeat swallowed up in victory. The winter of their discontent would change to glorious summer beneath the effulgence of God's love. And so the book ends with the jubilant strains of redemption. "Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

There is a wide divergence of opinion among scholars regarding the date of Obadiah's ministry. Some place it early. Jerusalem had been captured on three occasions prior to its final destruction by Chaldea, and as he makes no mention of either Assyrians or Babylonians, nor of the razing of the Temple, it has been thought that he must have referred to other than Nebuchadnezzar's siege. The bulk of

scholarship, however, is for a later date. A strange similarity between the writings of Obadiah and Jeremiah also raises an interesting problem. After examining the facts in detail, Sir George Adam Smith says "the result of our inquiry is that the Book of Obadiah was written by a prophet in exile, who was filled by the same hatred of Edom as filled another exile, who in Babylon wrote Psalm CXXXVII; and that, like so many of the exilic writers, he started from an earlier prophecy against Edom, already used by Jeremiah."

The exact period of the book, whatever it may be, is not of primary importance. The portrait of Obadiah, pious and patriotic, remains. Its features are untouched by the hand of Time, its colours unfaded by the passing years. His position was not "my country right or wrong," but rather "my country wrong and wronged." Faith in the working of Providence saved him from embitterment, and while it compelled him to be the messenger of wrath to the wrong-doer, it also gave him power to "cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt," and in quiet dependence on God's wisdom and goodness to trust and wait.

## HABAKKUK, THE OPTIMIST

Dealing with the problem of a good God and a bad world, he stands as a man of triumphant faith. His work supplemented Jeremiah's, during the time of Jehoiakim, king of Judah.

## *XII. HABAKKUK*

Is it possible to read character from handwriting? There are some who, expounding the science of graphology, affirm that it is. Personal traits and idiosyncrasies can be readily detected, they say, in a man's writing. For instance, ambition is denoted by signatures sloping upwards; lack of confidence or a tendency to melancholy by the downward slope. The punctilious man is noted in the precision with which he forms the letters, dots the i's and crosses the t's; the careless or hasty by his disregard of such trifles. Without discussing the matter further, this must be admitted: personality does express itself in many subtle and surprising ways. Sooner or later, the man reveals himself in what he says or writes. And, in one sense, that is the case with Habakkuk in the book bearing his name.

We perceive there a man of reverent spirit and keen, highly developed faculties. The radiant glory of the rising sun, the grandeur of the storm when the artillery of heaven booms forth and the hills quake, the noise of surging rivers, swollen by the rains, and hurling themselves against the rocks in their course, arouse feelings of awe in his breast. But as they speak of the Almighty Creator, whose power is thus

manifest in the world, deeper thoughts and questions clamouring for answer are born within him.

No reliable data about his origin are available except that gained from the book. From Chapter III we learn that Habakkuk was a Levite on the Temple staff, and possibly had some responsibility for the musical part of the services. But while it is unwise to put much emphasis on that, this is certain: he was given a recognized place among those who had received the oracles of God, and he assuredly is one of the finest writers in the Old Testament. The beauty of his language and his chaste style, entitle him to a place in the front rank of the prophetic school.

That he had been trained for the work he was to do is evident. By that we do not mean anything academic, but rather that he was a close student of the writings already disseminated. It may be only conjecture, but he seems to have been familiar with what Amos and Hosea had done for Israel, and Isaiah and Micah for Judah. There is more than a mere echo of their admonitions and their elevated thought of God in his prophecy. In addition, Habakkuk was apparently well-versed in the Law of Moses, for the precepts and promises made in the divine name lay close to his heart. A third book—if we may so put it—had likewise been constantly before his eyes. It was the Book of Life. And here his bewilderment arose. While he might turn from the tome of Nature,

conscious that there were secrets he could not unlock, he could not pass over the other two. The declared promises of Jehovah, on one side, and the experiences of life on the other, seemed hopelessly at variance. God's righteousness and man's wrong-doing, the divine omnipotence, and yet God's apparent passivity in face of stubborn disregard of the revealed will presented a problem for which he had no solution. Why was it? Why did the Book of Life seem to contradict the Book of God?

All that Amos and Hosea, directed by the Spirit of God, had said had come true. They had entreated in vain, threatened to no purpose, advised only to find their words ridiculed. They had declared how foolish it was for a small power like Israel to be mixed up with foreign rulers in any way. Syria would be swallowed up by her stronger neighbour, Assyria, and the promised help of the Pharaohs was as a broken reed compared with the aid they might have received from Jehovah. The burden of their message had been: Stand aside from these intrigues of the nations; they cannot further your destiny. Cleanse the soul of those sins that make you weak; that is your immediate duty. But such a policy appeared too unpractical. As we have previously pointed out, Israel disputed the lordship of Assyria, and Samaria was invested. After appalling privations, the capital fell. The land was laid low by the might of the conqueror. Twenty-eight thousand people were forcibly carried

away into servitude, and the Ten Tribes lost their identity forever. The northern kingdom had ceased to be. That was in B.C. 722.

One would think that such a disaster must have had a salutary effect upon Judah. But on the contrary, though Isaiah was there at work, and Micah was also pursuing his mission, their combined pleas and protests were ineffectual. After the death of King Hezekiah, the land sank in the mire of godlessness under Manasseh and Amon. And though afterwards there was temporary improvement under Josiah, yet the self-opinionated monarchs who came after him brought the nation within sight of ruin. Then during the reign of Jehoiakim, about the year B.C. 608, Habakkuk began to prophesy. The trial of Habakkuk's faith sprang out of the times. Current events were bound to affect one so spiritually minded. There was the declining prestige of Assyria, on one hand; on the other, the rise of a new world-power, Chaldea. The fall of Nineveh terminated Assyria's reign of conquest. The prophet had barely commenced his work when in B.C. 608 the battle of Megiddo was fought, and Josiah, king of Judah, slain. The crown passed to his son, Jehoahaz, but after a brief term of three months, he was deposed by Egypt, and his brother, Jehoiakim put in his place. All this, however, was only the prelude to further troubles.

Habakkuk felt that, between Chaldea and Egypt, now engaged in deadly rivalry, Judah was between

the upper and nether millstones. He beheld the havoc wrought by war. Added to that was the demoralization of his own race. With implicit belief in Jehovah's goodness came the difficulty of reconciling a bad world with a good God. The astounding thing, and one for which we cannot but give the man credit, is that he would not hide this from himself, nor did he attempt to gloss it over from the eyes of his fellows. He felt if he could not reconcile the facts, at least he would not ignore them. We find him intent on dragging doubts into the light of day.

Some time ago, we came upon one of those spy stories that for so long had a considerable vogue. The main figure was an officer of the Secret Service. He was home on a short leave, and had just become engaged to a lovely girl. But it so happened that staying in the same hotel, was a foreign lady, who was posing as a refugee. Word reached the officer that she was a spy, and the task assigned him from headquarters was to get sufficient information from her to secure her arrest, and also to checkmate those employing her. There was only one way. It was to spend a good deal of time in her company, and allowing her to suppose that he had become infatuated by her artless ways and her studied ingenuousness.

It can be seen at a glance how this lends itself to misunderstanding. The fiancée of the officer was stung by such patent infidelity. At last she openly taxed him with paying too much attention to the

bewitching adventuress. Although he implored the girl to trust him until he could explain, she was obstinate. She could not believe there could be anything but sheer infatuation. And we hear the pitiful pleadings of the lover, facing the hard fight between what he ought to do and what he desired. But though it meant a broken engagement and the return of his ring, he set himself to complete the work in hand. Of course, it all ended happily with the unmasking of the spy and the rapturous sound of marriage bells. But, has it not a higher application? Man fails to understand his heavenly Father. He is prone to judge by surface happenings. But in the end, God's ways are seen to be wisest and best.

The book opens with a dramatic dialogue between Jehovah and the prophet. Why should his prayers remain unanswered, and why, in the world of the All-Good, should violence be permitted? "O Lord, how long shall I cry?" But God never stifles the sincere questioner. He gives more light where it can be borne, and fuller knowledge where it can be apprehended. So the divine reply was heard in the subdued soul of Habakkuk. The invading Chaldeans would come. Their cavalry, swifter than leopards and fiercer than wolves, would ravage the fair land of Judah. Unbelief and persistence in disobedience, would incur the rod, for Chaldea was only God's instrument. The prophet is overwhelmed. It is not that the punishment outweighs the offence; it

is rather that the Holy One, righteous though His judgments are, should permit a heathen nation to work its cruel will upon the elect. "Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"

God is not angry without cause, but His wrath is not that of man. To the prophet had come the assurance that was given to another writer, that chastening is not necessarily a denial of the divine love: it may be proof of it. And though it was by the fires of war that the nation was to be refined, yet like gold in the crucible, merely the dross would be taken away. The gold would be all the purer for its purging. We need to keep that idea in mind. It will not only help us to understand the times of the prophet, which is important; it will also enable us to understand our own times, which is more important still.

But how shall the apparent contradiction be overcome? The evil is real enough, and Habakkuk cannot be blind to it. To him is given the certainty that the righteous God cannot act inconsistently. There must be an explanation. What is it? Chaldea may help to save Judah from her unbelief by breaking down her boasted self-sufficiency, and making her turn anew to the God who had called her into being. But though God may use a heathen power for this end, He cannot overlook the cruelty and the callous-

ness of the conqueror, for the sins of Chaldea are greater than those of Judah.

The colloquy breaks off abruptly. That does not imply that Jehovah would not deign to satisfy the demands of His perplexed servant. It was rather that He might answer him more conclusively by showing him things from a new angle. Neither Habakkuk nor any other man need fear that God will fail to clear His honour. The human father must, of necessity, do some things unintelligible to the immature mind of childhood, although love and wisdom may direct his course. Is it any wonder, then, that the ways of the Lord are sometimes unsearchable? But as the Sphinx of Egypt has withstood the blinding onslaught of desert sands, the character of God is unchanging. Habakkuk did not grasp this at first. The solution of his problems was, however, to come.

The seer was led from the teeming city, with its querulous crowds and recriminations, to the watch-tower. Isolation does not always yield a full answer to life's questions. One might stand on some lofty tower, like the Woolworth Building in New York, or the Eiffel Tower, in Paris, and while beholding more, actually see less of what was going on. The busy streets below, swarming with dark figures, would appear like some mammoth ant-hill, neither purpose nor plan discernible in their ceaseless activity.

There is, however, the detachment of the exalted life. The more we strive to look at things from God's

point of view—that is, the spiritual—the better our understanding. And so Habakkuk found. He was bidden to write the vision he saw. But before he could do so, interpreting aright God's dealings with men, personal faith must master his own life. A recent writer gives a striking account of the conversion of the artist who painted the pictures that adorn the Capitol at Washington. He was an unbeliever in Christianity, and as a subject of American history was required, he chose the embarkation of the Pilgrim Fathers without a thought of its religious associations. After outlining his characters as grouped on the deck of the *Mayflower*, the question arose, why were they there? He saw that they were animated by some principle he could not comprehend. He studied their times, their lives, their deeds, their sacrifices, their plans and hopes; and the truth gradually stole into his soul, till he had learned to believe in their God and Saviour. He found that the secret spring of all their actions was their religion; that their lives were hidden with Christ in God, and that they could abandon home, country, wealth, for freedom to live for Christ. Not till he became a Christian could he understand their motives or characters, or was he fitted to put his immortal work upon canvas.

Habakkuk's inner life was renewed; then with telling emphasis he wrote. Wickedness was everywhere prevalent. Pride and worldliness puffed up the souls of many. Still there were a righteous few

to be found, and to such the inspiriting word, later quoted by the Apostle Paul, was spoken "The just shall live by his faith." Faith was the golden key that should unlock all mysteries or, at any rate, bring deliverance to the believer, beset by dismal misgiving, and imprisoned in the dungeon of doubt. Tennyson reaffirms this truth:

> "We have but faith: we cannot know;
> For knowledge is of things we see;
> And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
> A beam in darkness: let it grow."

Like the gleaming lance of a search-light, piercing the armour of night, God's word illumined what before seemed inexplicable. The divine control was not relaxed. If Chaldea exceeded, in her power and vanity, the retributive yet holy will of God, she should be called to answer for it at the bar of God. Habakkuk breaks forth into his Taunt Songs against the oppressor. Correction and discipline cannot pass beyond God's permissive decrees. And so, over against the agonizing suspense of that hour, stands the fact of the divine authority, and in the realized nearness of the Eternal God this man found peace. "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him." It was an anticipation of Browning's familiar couplet:

> "God's in His heaven—
> All's right with the world!"

But Habakkuk's faith is superior even to Browning's, for while "heaven" savours of Deism with its absentee God, Habakkuk felt Him to be the one great reality, bound up in the welfare of the race.

Professor Henry Jones, of Glasgow University, discussing Browning says, "the test of a philosophic optimism, as of any optimism which is more than a pious sentiment, must finally lie in its power to reveal the presence of the good in actual individual evils. But there are difficulties still nearer than those presented by concrete facts, difficulties arising out of the very suggestion that evil is a form of good. Such speculative difficulties must be met by a reflective mind, before it can follow out the application of an optimistic theory to particular facts. Now, Browning's creed, at least as he held it in his later years, was not merely the allowable exaggeration of an ecstatic religious sentiment, the impassioned conviction of a God-intoxicated man. It was deliberately presented as a solution of moral problems, and was intended to serve as a theory of the spiritual nature of things."

In the prophet's pages, there is a grim picture of the wicked, gathering his ill-gotten catch with the drag-net. Materially, the position of the land was serious, for the blasted vegetation and the empty stall tell their own tale. Spiritually, there were barrenness and decay. And Jehovah, if He had not forsaken the people on whom He had formerly showered blessing, seemed remote. But then, in response to

God's direction, Habakkuk looked out from his watchtower, with the eyes of faith.

We were tramping one day among the Welsh hills. The day was gloomy and the valley shrouded in damp, rolling mists. The track turned upward, and as we clambered on, at last the top of the range was attained. But while the mists still rolled forbiddingly at our feet, and the village we had left seemingly lay sunk beneath a grey sea, the sky above was radiantly clear. Far-away, the light showed the stretching meadows of the gentle slopes, fair and serene. So if we were to climb to the high-place of our God, all life would take on a new aspect. Hope and joy would be ours.

More than most things, we need power to scale the heights and walk on the high places. Life and its mysterious happenings compel us to trudge with weary feet through the valleys. Our outlook is circumscribed. Our hearts become heavy. But Faith makes a way of escape. After all, we are not the sport of fate. We are not even the children of time. We are the sons and daughters of the Almighty, and it is the Father's will that we should mount above the limiting circumstances of our days and pass beyond them into the ampler air of eternal things. Where the mountain goats move with unerring feet, in the bright sunlight of the hills, where all life rejoices in the invigorating air of the uplands, there in a spiritual sense the soul of man is meant to dwell.

It is the glowing experience of men like Habakkuk. They live in the consciousness of the divine presence. And lo! it is as though they see things with other eyes, and what is more, see other things with their eyes.

Turner, the famous artist, listened good-humouredly to a lady's criticism of one of his works. "But, Mr. Turner," she said, "I cannot see the things in Nature that you put into your pictures." "No, madam?" he asked. "Don't you wish you could?" And so it is with the spiritually enlightened. They are beset with doubts and fears. They know what it is to suffer. But they never question the good hand of God upon them, even if for a season it may be the hidden hand. They are not mournful and sad, though the time may seem to warrant it. They are not dull and earth-bound. On the contrary, they seem to know that in the bountiful providence of the heavenly Father, all will be well. And this faith moves their hearts to a song of joyous trust, gushing forth, cool and sparkling as the springs that leap in gladsome play from the bosom of the hillside. These men have companied with the Lord Himself upon the Mount. And like Him, their faces and their faith are transfigured. Nor is that all! Like Him too, they come back from their sojourn among the uplands to make the world better and brighter for their presence. All is not wrong, though there is much that may be so. All is not purposeless, even if there be much that is

puzzling. And they are spurred by their belief to do something to meet the world's need by applying truths they have discovered for themselves. For just as Jesus met the distracted father whom His servants could not aid, healing his son, and driving away the shrouded figure of care, so the consecrated may carry on the Master's beneficent ministry.

Another fact of prime importance must be taken into account. Habakkuk differs from all the other prophets in this; his ability to look at the times from a new point of view. Jeremiah who had shortly preceded him regarded the Chaldean invasion as the only thing that could happen to a nation estranged from God. It had disregarded the warnings of a pure-hearted patriot like Isaiah. It had resisted the tender entreaties of Micah. If it then continued in sin what more was there to say? What more was there that even God could do? Foreign leagues, arranged in defiance of Jehovah's commands, were bound to be hurtful to the nation He had chosen for a specific duty. Dependence upon material power meant the exclusion of God. Moreover, the friction between the powers themselves meant that such alliances were not only futile, but wholly unnecessary.

Habakkuk saw the wrong-doing of the nation. He neither minimized its guilt nor sought to place responsibility on others. It was all true, terribly true, that the incorrigible must suffer. But while the

former prophets seemed to plead God's cause before man, Habakkuk now stood to plead man's before God. The indubitable justice of the Almighty made more offensive the injustice that the foe was inflicting. To say that God was using Chaldea as an instrument was hard; but to advance any reason why He should, when the prophet saw the ferocity of the foeman. . . . ? It was terrible to think that God could sanction it at all!

It was a time of heart-searching for Habakkuk. The more he brooded over things, the more intolerable they became. Here, inexorable as death, were questions that must be answered. If God were good—and He was,—why were the wicked allowed to put their dastardly plans into execution? If God were omnipotent—and He was,—why did He not repress these rapacious bands with a single gesture? If God were One who kept faith with His people—and He was,—why did He not intervene on their behalf?

Out of his doubts, the Prophet forged a new belief in the just character of the Infinite. Against the dark background of human hatred, greed and aggression, stood forth the pure presence of the All-Holy. A far-reaching discovery was made. Tyranny recoils on the head of the tyrant; as men do to others, it shall be done to them. Chaldea subsequently proved this. So did Alexander the Great, the Cæsars, Charlemagne, and Napoleon, in a later day.

Thus two principles of life are laid down: violence brings retribution; unfaltering trust secures the divine succour.

Then a refreshing confidence fills his heart. In the midst of human travail, he finds grace to pray. Where before he had been on the brink of despair, like a traveller lost in the trackless desert, like a shipwrecked mariner dying of thirst, now circumstances were subordinated to faith. He breaks out into a rapturous song of trust: "*Although* the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: *Yet* I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength." If only we could link on our "though" to a "yet!" We can, for the training of Habakkuk, his teaching, his testing, all point the same way. If we follow the gleam that shines athwart the most leaden sky, we shall come to a like triumphant trust. Dr. John Watson says, "The splendid idealism of the greater Hebrew prophets who saw the dawn breaking afar on the Person of the Messiah gave way to the bitter cynicism of the author of Ecclesiastes. Judaism, if you accept the Prophets as its most characteristic interpreters, raised optimism to a creed and embodied it as a people. Buddhism, if you judge it by the example of its illustrious founder, disparaged even existence,

and has clouded the horizon of the East. At the beginning of last century Leibnitz declared this the best of all possible worlds, and towards its close Rousseau preached a state of Nature as Paradise, but after this century had been born in blood and fire, Schopenhauer considered that life was less than gain, and Leopardi hungered for death. In our own day we have heard Emerson lift up his voice in perpetual sunshine, and have gone with Carlyle when he walked in darkness and saw no light."

But that is not so with the Christian. He may cast out the doubts that sit enthroned in the hearts of men, the evil spirits of depression and gloom, of doubt and melancholy, that they may affright him no more. For what is the word of Habakkuk to us? This, in substance: We are the offspring of God. We are meant not for the valley of fears, but for the high place of faith; not for the Slough of Despond, but for the Delectable Mountains with their glimpse of the Celestial City and the good yet to be!

We saw in our dream that God sent an angel to earth, and when men beheld her luminous face and shimmering attire, they desired that she should remain. No prison bars could hold her, so they clipped her wings that she might not soar back to the supernal clime. She became a ministrant to the forlorn. Her song was changed, but still she sang. Up and down the earth she roamed. No matter what man's tongue, she had the universal language that reached

every troubled heart, for she knew the secret of sympathy. She paused by the desk of the merchant, the bench of the artisan, in the kitchen of the housewife. She laid her hand on the curls of the children, and on the wounds of the stricken. The dungeon grew radiant with her presence, the gloom vanished as when God spake His divine fiat to the chaotic universe: "Let there be light!" And the sick-room, where the spectral figure lurked within the shadows, was robbed of its fears. The widow in her affliction, the orphan in his desolation, the prodigal in his misery, were alike gladdened by her low-breathed melody. Sailors on the lonely deep, thinking of loved ones far away, wanderers remote from the habitations of men, exiles misunderstood and reviled by their fellows, heard her voice and were cheered. The soldier stricken on the battle field, the surgeon and nurse surrounded by the ghastly scenes of disease, the reformer striving for his country's good, and the visionary with some dream of progress yet unrealized, alike were enabled to rejoice amid discouragement. And her name was what? They wondered. Through the darkness, pilgrims held on their way undismayed. The sound of her voice strengthened them, though her bright form they could not always discern. And her song fills the world to this day, rising full and clear over the strident noises of the market-place. She leads generations on. It will ring in our children's ears. It can never be subdued while God is omnipo-

tent. It is an echo of the angelic strain that filled the still night with heavenly harmonies above Bethlehem's hills. And her name is Optimism!

The message that comes to us, glowing from the heart of Habakkuk, is timely to a degree. It lifts the emphasis from the seen to the unseen, from the temporal to the eternal. And its keynote is, "The just shall live by his faith." Therefore, we may take new courage. God is still the unfailing Helper of those who trust Him. None looking to Him shall ever be put to shame. Thus saith the Lord!

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTH CENTURY

## *INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTH CENTURY*

Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk, had witnessed for God, and still the temper of Judah had remained unaltered. Hampered by heathen alliances, when she was meant to stand aloof from merely material considerations, she was eventually drawn into the maelstrom and lost. Nebuchadnezzar grew tired of her vacillation and what he viewed as her impertinence. Although Jerusalem had been invaded before, King Jehoiachin captured and then taken with a number of his subjects to Babylon, still insurrection simmered in Judah's heart. Nebuzar-adan, a trusted warrior, was sent to strike terror to this irritating nation. He adopted no half-measures. The principal buildings, including the Temple, were sacked, their walls torn down and their treasures looted. The main body of the people was then taken off to spend those weary years in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem was a desolation. The melancholy predictions of Isaiah and those who followed him were borne out, and all the fond hopes that had been cherished from David and Solomon onwards were blasted. Thus to the exiles in a heathen land memory poured out a nauseous draught.

"For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these; 'It might have been.'"

Judah had loved darkness rather than light, and the light had been withdrawn. She had chosen her own way, and it had brought her to penury and bondage. She had turned aside from God, and now she could not but feel that God had hidden His face from her. But had He? Could God cast her off, or if the prophecies that outlined her fate had been fulfilled, would those that breathed a hope of reconciliation fail? Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah supply the answer.

## EZEKIEL, THE EXILED MYSTIC

Commencing his ministry during Jehoiakim's reign, Ezekiel, of the priesthood, was one of the first party to be deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, in B.C. 597. There he organized the religious life of the exiles, directed certain literary work, and was the founder of Judaism.

## *XIII. EZEKIEL*

"What is the matter with Goldsmith tonight?" Dr. Samuel Johnson was sitting with some friends one evening when Goldsmith entered excitedly and showed some of the company a book he had brought. It was his ecstatic delight that called forth Johnson's question. "At the age of forty, he has just discovered Ezekiel," was the reply. It transpired that Goldsmith had opened a Bible that morning, and had stumbled upon the writings of Ezekiel. He was soon immersed in the entrancing pages. Hour after hour, he read on. Then as evening came, remembering that his friends would be gathered together, he hurried off, his finger in the book to mark the place. The amusement and raillery that greeted him did not damp his enthusiasm. "He is a master, this Ezekiel," he cried. "Why did I never hear of this writer before? Listen to this—and this!" And so passage after passage he read. It was indeed a discovery, and one that for wealth of literary beauty is still worth making.

It goes without saying that the book of Ezekiel is hard to comprehend. So is the prophet himself. Yet he is a fascinating study. He was connected with the priesthood, and for a time may also have

been associated with Jeremiah in his ministry. Undoubtedly, he had opposed the policy of King Jehoiakim, and when Jerusalem surrendered, and a number of the people were carried captive to Babylon, Ezekiel was among the first party that bade farewell to the land of their birth. He had hoped against hope that the catastrophe might be prevented. That was not to be. No matter how merciful and gracious Jehovah might be, the land was stiff-necked and impervious to reason. Cleansing through tribulation could alone save even a remnant. Whatever Ezekiel had tried to do before the fall of the city had proved ineffective. But then a change took place both in himself and his hearers. First look at the prophet. What kind of man was he?

His mental outlook reflects his upbringing. As a priest, he had been steeped in the sacred Law. Taught to hold implicitly to the faithfulness of the great Jehovah, that holy name called forth both reverence and awe. It stood for justice, unquestionable righteousness, and above all for consistency. Jehovah was God alone. Wars might plague the earth, and rival nations contend for the mastery. But high above the clash of arms, the hoarse cries of battling hosts, the cheers of the conqueror, and moanings of the vanquished, God sat immovable. His purpose none could circumvent.

There by the river Chebar, in distant Babylon, Ezekiel settled down with a number of his fellow

Hebrews. There was no bondage in the sense of slavery; it was rather that they were compelled to live in exile. Possibly Nebuchadnezzar's first intention was to hold them as hostages or, by carrying away some of Judah's leading citizens, to strike terror into those who were still not amenable to his rule. However, the new community was organized. Homes were founded. Some who could sow the soil got to work, while others went about their accustomed ways of earning a livelihood. Ezekiel, both by his previous experience and his office, was somewhat out of place. There was no Temple where he could officiate, nor would the disposition of his brethren at that time be unduly devout. There was too much to shake their faith. Had not God cast them off? Had He not permitted the graceless offender to tear down their holiest beliefs? How then could they remember One who had forgotten them?

Such were the criticisms seething in Ezekiel's mind as, dejected and inconsolable, he turned aside from those who were busy with their own affairs. At first the words had stung. He had resented the imputations cast upon the name of God. But later, to his own confusion, he found himself half assenting to such opinions! In this mood he sat down by the river. There was something in the movement of the waters that soothed his troubled soul. He watched them idly. There was nothing else to do; he had no

part or lot in the labours of others. He was left, a prey to the questionings of the hour. Those leaves and that fragment of bark, eddying for a moment in a circle, then carried on unresisting by the force of the current, seemed a parable of life. His faith, his hopes, his cherished beliefs, were powerless when the mighty floods of circumstance swept them along. And man was victim of life's vicissitudes. "The times are out of joint!" What was the use of battling against the inequitable ordering of events!

Was that worthy of one schooled under the divine influence? Surely there must be some nobler part to play than that of craven acquiescence in things as they were! In that place of seclusion, as to Moses in the deserts of Midian, and Elijah beneath the juniper tree of complaint, God found His sorrowful servant. The effect produced by the experience was tremendous. There came to him a revelation of the divine Being. It defied description, even as his attempts at describing it are beyond our full comprehension. His florid language, the living creatures and whirling wheels of which he writes, almost paralyze the mind. Yet as Mendelssohn proved in his "Songs without Words," truths may be imparted without depending on mere phraseology. Ezekiel had become acutely aware not only of the glory of the transcendent God, but also of the fact of His nearness. God was there! He who had watched over His people in the former exile in Egypt, who had led them like a flock,

who had stretched out His arm for their deliverance in times past, was not unmindful! Though the views of that time had limited Him, in one sense, to the narrow confines of the Holy of Holies, memory lit up the dark recesses of the prophet's soul. King Solomon had had a glimpse of a superb truth when, at the dedication of that Temple where Ezekiel had served, he cried: "Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built!" It is always the way. Give to world-weary, dispirited man, whose eyes are dim with the dust of earth's doings, who is troubled with the mischances of the years, a new consciousness of God's real presence, and life can never be the same. For him, no less than for Ezekiel, the impenetrable veil is momentarily rent. He is gladdened as well as surprised. The All-Wise has not failed!

Immediately, the call to service sounded. Ezekiel was no longer to waste time in vain regrets or enervating fears. That his fellow-men had abandoned their faith required swift action on his part. That they had lost heart demanded valour of one whose privileges had been greater. No longer must his tongue be silent but, inspired by God, be ready to comfort, to counsel, and to cheer. Moreover, he might yet speak in the name of the Almighty to those who remained in Jerusalem. There was still some intercourse between the exiles and their friends at home. And though Ezekiel was warned by God that Judah

was still uncaring, like a watchman, he must lift up his voice if haply they would hear.

The first part of Ezekiel's work, therefore, lay between the first deportation in B.C. 597 until the final siege of Jerusalem in B.C. 587. During this time he ordered the religious life of the community. He combined both the prophetic and the priestly ministry. While no Temple was theirs, certain stated gatherings were arranged, at which prayer and worship were offered, where the Law might be read, and the spiritual life be quickened. In addition, just as Jeremiah had once sent letters from Jerusalem to the exiled company in Chaldea, Ezekiel addressed his prophetic writings to those who remained, impenitent and incredulous regarding any further misfortune, within Judah itself.

That does not imply that Ezekiel's lot was any easier. On the contrary, as he sought to follow the heavenly guidance, difficulties increased. Among the exiles there were both apathy and querulousness. He was consumed with righteous anger against them. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. . . . Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal." With consummate skill he draws the picture of Israel's past. Especially does he show that Judah, endowed more richly than Samaria and the nations round about, had returned nothing but waywardness and coarse

ingratitude for all the mercies a loving God had bestowed. His patience had been tried time after time, and yet He had not rejected them for ever.

Another section of the community had given way to despair. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." It was no use trying to be better. Like Sidney Carton, whom Dickens depicts in *A Tale of Two Cities*, when reminded of his wasted life and yet exhorted to begin again, the suggestion seemed hopeless. "It is too late for that. I shall never be better than I am. I shall sink lower, and be worse. . . . I am like one who died young—all my life might have been!" And so, to his friends Ezekiel held up the torch of truth by which the path to peace might be discerned. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God."

Two noteworthy phases of Ezekiel's teaching greet us. The Almighty is seen to be not only unique in wisdom and power, but also solicitous above all things for the good of His children. Though punishment is the consequence of sin, it merely follows the outworking of those laws by which man's well-being is safeguarded, just as, in the physical life, pain follows the infraction of natural laws. God does not directly inflict it, though He permits it. His desire is to have the wanderer brought back, his sin pardoned, and the soul saved from the error of its ways.

The other point meriting consideration is the

value placed upon the individual. As personal responsibility is stressed, so is a man's worth. Each life is singled out before the Omniscient One; the relationship is that of a child to its father. And so in his contact with those about him, Ezekiel exercised a ministry of solace and help where he was permitted to enter their life.

From B.C. 587 to 586, Jerusalem was again besieged. During that period Ezekiel was silent. We may take the opportunity of scrutinizing the man himself. While it may be said that his visions of Jehovah bear some resemblance to Isaiah's and his prophecies to Jeremiah's, Ezekiel was, nevertheless, original in both standpoint and expression. He was essentially a mystic. Imaginative and poetical, he makes lavish use of emblems, parables, and pictures. In that he was truly a son of the east. There have been many endowed with this power to body forth the unseen in concrete form, even if not in the same degree. William Blake, another mystic, once said that while to others the rising sun appeared only as a huge disc, something like a golden guinea, it created in him a deep sense of the divine grandeur. He saw there the glory of God, and heard the cherubim chanting, "Holy, holy, holy!" But Ezekiel was more than a visionary. He combined the apparently contradictory. He was both a dreamer and a doer. Tracing the trials of the days to their origin, he formulated the causes of the nation's downfall. He

enjoined the keeping of God's law and urged that trust which can wait patiently for the development of Jehovah's plans. Thus he secured the support of his fellows. The Sabbath was again duly observed. Worship took a new lease of life, in that it was not enforced, but voluntary. Family life was henceforth to be jealously guarded and brotherhood displayed between man and man. Thus, under the determined leadership of this gifted servant of God, making his impress daily deeper upon the life of the time, faith was saved from annihilation.

With the Fall of Jerusalem, the most heedless were compelled to admit the validity of the Prophet's words. His influence increased with his prestige. And while at first he had met with scant response, many were now ready to be guided by his counsel and heartened by his promises of future good. These showed, in roseate hues, the Shepherd of the chosen people, antetype of the Good Shepherd, gathering the scattered sheep into the fold. The land was to be renewed; while, under the figure of that skeleton host, dead on the field of battle, but restored at the divine fiat, the nation was again to find life and vigour. How could they count on the fulfilment of such prophecies? Ezekiel gives the reason. The honour of God had been intrusted to His people. They had failed Him. He had been dishonoured by them even as His trust in them had been betrayed. But for the sake of the holy name, Jehovah would act, "I will

sanctify My great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned." Then followed the assured cleansing from defilement. A heart, no longer hard and unresponsive, but receptive and obedient, should be theirs. A new spirit should animate them, and instead of the Law written on tables of stone, the new Law should be engraved upon the soul.

The book closes with a vision of Jerusalem, rehabilitated and beautified, and of the Temple, once more resounding with the praises of the Eternal and sending forth its beneficent influences to gladden the world. Ezekiel sees a stream surging from the threshold of God's House. On the first measurement, it reached to the ankles; farther along, it came to the knees; then as it widened and deepened in its course, "It was a river that I could not pass over. . . . waters to swim in." On the banks, trees were growing. Gladness and fertility, cleansing and refreshment, abounded. "Every thing shall live whither the river cometh." And while at first we are reminded of that river of the Water of Life, flowing through the Paradise of God, its banks likewise decked with the trees of immortal beauty, there is another suggestion in the Prophet's words.

Small though its beginnings in the Upper Room at Jerusalem, the Christian Church began to flow with ever-increasing volume and force. Like the stream Hercules diverted to cleanse the Augean Stables, it

carried away the defilement of sin, and brought life and refreshment as it went. Through the centuries, the river of redemptive grace has been running. Human life has been purified and ennobled. Its deep thirst has been assuaged. In a thousand ways of which the world knows little, its blessing and happiness have been secured by those unfailing waters. Bishop Whipple once told a strange story of a man he knew. He was well-educated, and occupied a position of considerable importance in his city. But for many years, he had been an avowed sceptic. He had read many books assailing Christianity, but at last he turned from his infidelity. These were his reasons for the change that took place: "First, I am a man. I am going somewhere. Today I am a day nearer the grave than I was yesterday. I have read all that such books can tell me. They shed not one solitary ray upon the darkness. They shall not take away the only guide and leave me stone-blind. Second, I had a mother. I saw her go down the dark valley where I am going, and she leaned upon an unseen arm as calmly as a child goes to sleep on the bosom of its mother. I know that this was not a dream. Third, I have three motherless daughters" (and he said it with tears in his eyes). "They have no protector but myself. I would rather kill them than leave them in this sinful world if you were to blot out from it all the teachings of the Gospel."

Ezekiel is considered to be the founder of Judaism. But better still, he led those exiles to a deeper faith in the vital truths of religion. While all his prophecies were not fulfilled to the letter, the desire for Judah's reclamation which he cherished so ardently was, although he did not live to see that consummation. The full value of his work must be gauged not only by the effect his witness produced, but also by the faith his courageous testimony still inspires. Trial and tribulation come. They are part of the Christian's lot. But in unfaltering obedience, he may pursue the path of duty, confident that, even if the divine aim be sometimes hard to apprehend, "God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain."

So the portrait of Ezekiel shows the mystic. His eyes scan the heavens and the earth, where things hidden from the common gaze gleam with solemn radiance, where the spiritual realm throws wide its portals to a supersensitive nature, and where in unfamiliar forms the symbolic appears. But as we contemplate the man's face, we note also evidence of practical ability. He may set down in unusual language and in strange guise the things he has seen; that is only what we might expect. His object, however, was to attain certain well-defined ends. If he must take cognizance of the effect of apostasy, as he sits rapt by Chebar's banks, he also goes to its roots. If he cannot shut out from his thought the tribulations through which his race has passed, he

must perforce remember that the hand now giving correction once led the fathers through Egypt's night of terror. An unusual combination of priest and prophet, ritualist and reformer, pastor and preacher, he fills a singular place in the gallery of these great pioneers. Yet his belief in God's goodness is not the least of his magnificent qualities. Whittier might well have had Ezekiel in mind when he sang:

> "He has not lived in vain, and while he gives
> The praise to Him in whom he moves and lives,
> With thankful heart;
> He gazes backward, and with hope before,
> Knowing that from his works he nevermore
> Can henceforth part."

It is necessary, at this point, to take up the thread of the story. At the time of the Captivity, Babylon had reached the peak. From the book of Daniel we gain a sidelight on the kingly state of Nebuchadnezzar, and the vanity engendered by his prowess in the field. When the crown passed to Nabonidus he, not wishing to take up residence in Babylon, appointed his son, Belshazzar, to reign in his place. The overthrow of this dissolute prince by Cyrus, king of Persia, forms the subject of the enthralling narrative related in Daniel, chapter v.

For about seven years, the Persians had been gathering strength, and Cyrus proved a formidable foe. Kingdom after kingdom went down before his

assaults, and, in 538, he became master of the vast Chaldean empire.

His victorious arms brought new hope to the exiles. They followed his career with eager eyes; they heard of his clemency and magnanimity with exultation. Was this the agent of Jehovah, whose hands would throw open the gates of liberty? It seemed incredible! But God's ways, though unsearchable and past finding out, are fraught with illimitable possibilities of good. Without delay, Cyrus took steps to consolidate his conquest. One of his first acts was to sign a decree, liberating the Jewish people from their servitude, and permitting as many as desired to return to their own borders. His object in doing this is not altogether clear. He may have felt that, to secure the favour of the Hebrews' God, it was incumbent on him to remedy the wrongs under which they smarted. It is also probable that he had other motives. To have a happy, contented people iving in their own land, instead of a colony of disaffected exiles in another, was good policy. To have a country in which trade and agriculture were again flourishing, instead of a desolate waste, was sound economics. Moreover, with the ever-present contingency of Egypt's military activity, a repeopled Palestine would provide a useful bulwark, for none fight so well as those whose homes are in danger.

Whatever the grounds for the edict, humanly speaking, it was an accomplished fact. The first

company of returning exiles, headed by Zerubbabel, himself a descendant of David, set out to the number of over forty-two thousand. It was a long and trying journey, but buoyed up by the knowledge that God was behind all that had occurred, that He was with them no matter what the future might bring, they successfully crossed the desert and at last reached Jerusalem, the beloved, there to re-establish their homes.

## DANIEL, THE DARING

With the exception of David, Daniel, the young Hebrew transported to the Chaldean capital, was the ideal figure of the Jews. The book itself was written at a later period, but it illustrates the trials of Jehovah's loyal servants. It also records the dramatic entry into history of Cyrus, the Mede.

## *XIV. DANIEL*

Daniel is the ideal figure of ancient Judaism. Perhaps more than any other hero of its chequered history, he embodies the sterling qualities of his race at its best. Nurtured in a trying period of the nation's life, fortitude was developed as faith deepened. It was no time for weaklings. By a natural process they would have been eliminated. Strength of character was a prime requisite, and the tempestuous winds of adversity served, like those sweeping the lonely mountain pines, to drive the roots to a more tenacious hold of the soil. A man of conscience and conviction, of unwavering virtue and valour, high-minded and yet humble, Daniel became a name with which to conjure. The very mention of it thrilled men, bracing the will and nerving the arm for stalwart service. It sounded like a bugle-blast, summoning up reserves of latent bravery when emergencies arose. And so it is not surprising that, when Judah's morale fell low in the second century B.C., when fierce and galling persecution assailed her under Antiochus Epiphanes, the story of this chivalrous soul should be written to warm the blood congealed by the chill night of despondency. The date of the book thus written was probably about B.C. 165.

The crisis of that period arose out of the attempt made by Antiochus Epiphanes to introduce Greek customs among the Jews. The high priest Onias III had resisted this. He was deposed in favour of Jason, who instituted a policy calculated to excite the anger of the patriot and all to whom the worship of Jehovah was dear. The Temple ritual was abolished. The sacred rolls were destroyed. Sabbath observance and certain Jewish rites were declared illegal. As a crowning insult, an altar to Jupiter was built in the Temple, and swine sacrificed on it. What took place in the capital was repeated on a smaller scale throughout the land. At a little town called Modin, between Joppa and Jerusalem, lived a saintly priest named Mattathias. When Apelles, the king's commissioner, ordered him to make the pagan offering, he indignantly refused. A renegade Jew stepped forth to do so. At this, the patriarch could contain himself no longer. With his own hand he smote the fellow to the ground, slew the commissioner, and tore the altar down. This was overt rebellion. Calling on his five sons to follow him, he welded into one courageous company all those who loved God more than they feared death. This ushered in the stirring era of the Maccabees. From their mountain strongholds, through weary months of hardship and amazing fortitude, they sallied out to do battle for conscience and liberty. Baffled, their numbers sorely depleted, then afterwards gathering strength as the

tide flowed again, Judas Maccabeus gave himself no rest until Jerusalem was conquered, the Temple purified, and the daily oblation to Jehovah restored. It could be understood, therefore, how vast the influence of Daniel's story in such a day. That is why a narrative that had been told about the camp fires, or in the gloomy days of exile, would stiffen the powers of resistance and re-energize the nation's will.

Although modern scholars ascribe the book to this period, that does not necessarily deny the historicity of Daniel himself. No one can dispute the fact of the French Revolution, when public passion burst all barriers and the enslaved rose in revolt. That took place in 1789; Carlyle's history of it was not written until nearly fifty years later. Thus we hold that, while the book of Daniel was penned long after Judah's magnanimous son lived, Daniel himself is too human, virile, and convincing, to be simply a legendary figure. In order to gauge the genuine worth of the man we must look at him in the light of his times.

Jehoiakim had rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, led an army against his vassal. Invading Judah, he carried off Jehoiachin, now king, with all the sacred vessels of the Temple and also a number of hostages. Consequently, several young Hebrews, apparently selected to be trained as courtiers, are found in the court of Babylon. Four of them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They

were renamed Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The group soon found itself in a quandary about the provision made for it. The Levitical laws prohibited heathen food, and the four determined that, at all costs, they would abstain from the palace fare. They respectfully stated their case to the steward. While he demurred at first, fearing to endanger his head if he broke the regulations, at length he consented to a test. At the end of ten days, it was seen that instead of showing signs of debilitation after their plain diet, they had improved both in appearance and weight. This incident is related by the writer to show the invincible rights of conscience. Then, as though in fulfilment of the promise that "those that honour Me, them will I also honour," God gave them knowledge and skill; while to Daniel was given power to understand and interpret visions

We come now to Daniel's service before Nebuchadnezzar. As is well-known, the ancients paid considerable attention to dreams. Therefore, on this occasion, the king was greatly perturbed because he had not only dreamt, but also had forgotten what he had seen. His soothsayers being unable to satisfy the royal curiosity, Daniel was sought. Fortifying himself with prayer, he was led to the king, and there he related both the dream and its significance. A great statue with a head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the body and thighs of brass, and the legs

of iron and clay, had appeared to the king. This figure was emblematic. The gold stood for the realm of Babylon; the silver, the kingdom of the Medes; and the brass, that of the Persians, established by Cyrus. The iron, represented the Greek, inaugurated by Alexander the Great; while the two feet typified the divisions of the Greek kingdom—the Seleucidæ reigning over Syria and Babylon, and the Ptolemies over Egypt. Daniel is here shown as a man of real dependence upon God, and one through whom the divine will was made known.

It is at first singular, after the admission that Nebuchadnezzar made to Daniel that "your God is a God of gods," to find the next chapter telling of another image of gold, a veritable Colossus, that he set up. To this, divine honours were to be rendered. But a careful reading of the story leads one to believe that the scheme emanated from the jealous minds about the throne. It was decreed that at a given signal, when the music burst out, all were to fall down and worship this statue. Any who refused to do so were to be burned alive. For some inexplicable reason, Daniel has no part in this incident. It concerns the undaunted three, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and their firm hold of their principles. Naturally, the courtiers would not be too well disposed towards those who had gained the king's notice. And we detect a subtle plan to compass their ruin. They assuredly would not bow down to

any image; therefore, the furnace would claim its victims.

The plan succeeded. Even the most sanguine could hardly have anticipated the result. The command to render homage being ignored, the three youths were arraigned before the king. Their conduct seemed a poor return for all the favours bestowed on them, and Nebuchadnezzar was furious at their obduracy. His threats, however, were futile. The Hebrews were willing to obey their lord in every reasonable way. But when it came to flagrant disloyalty to God, they were adamant. With fine courage they exclaimed, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." They were cast into the fire, only to find a divine protector therein, and to emerge unscathed. And the chronicler takes this as proof that to all who might have to endure the fires of persecution, whatever the circumstances, help to remain steadfast was as certain as ultimate deliverance.

Daniel reappears in the next chapter as the interpreter of dreams. Nebuchadnezzar has seen a mighty tree, laden with leaves and fruit. A heavenly messenger utters its doom: "Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches. . . . Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth." This vision is referred by Daniel to the king himself. Laid low in his pride, insanity should temporarily seize him, and like a

beast of the field, he should roam the earth. Shakespeare's pathetic picture of old King Lear, driven from his palace to range the tempest-sodden countryside, helps us to realize the plight of the afflicted Nebuchadnezzar.

The gripping incident of Belshazzar's feast is next related. From both historians and the inscriptions that have been discovered, we gather that Babylon had passed to Nabonidus, prior to the Persian invasion, and Belshazzar was his son. With capable pen, the writer describes the scene. Surrounded by a thousand nobles and their ladies, the king, bemused by wine and the flattery of his guests, seeks to astonish them with his daring. The sacred vessels brought from Jerusalem had been long treasured as trophies of martial conquest. But now this careless monarch wanted to show his intrepidity and his freedom from superstitious fears. He ordered the golden cups to be brought forth. Explaining with what veneration they had been regarded by the Jews, Belshazzar allowed them to pass from hand to hand. Their weight in solid gold and silver, their chaste design, and expert workmanship, awakened the admiration of the company. But Belshazzar intended to do more than that. At his command, those vessels consecrated to the service of Jehovah were filled with wine. Unsteadily rising to his feet, Belshazzar took a brimming cup and bade them all drink to the honour of their tutelary deities.

A hush fell upon the chamber. The king's words sounded like a challenge to this Being whom Judah held in reverence. A few waited, with awed looks and blanched faces, expecting summary vengeance to be meted out to one so profane. But nothing happened! The tension was relaxed. Laughing at their fears, praising the temerity of their host, amid a babel of drunken revelling, the toast was drunk. As the king drained his cup, his eyes caught a glimpse of the palace wall. A hand was writing in letters of fire, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin." Like many another, bold and uncaring in the hour of gaiety and popularity, when things go well and all speak fair, but craven as a whipped hound when faced with spiritual realities, Belshazzar crumpled in his seat. A thousand accusing spectres flitted before his gaze. Voices he had thought silent forever, mocked and reviled him. Even when he closed his eyes in utter dread, the fearsome words burned their way into his being. In terror, he called for his necromancers to make clear the meaning of this message from the unseen. On the spur of the moment, they were unable to frame a satisfactory explanation or else felt it safer to leave the task to some who valued life less. It was the queen who remembered how Daniel had won fame as a reader of signs, and at once he was summoned to the banqueting hall.

With the prodigal generosity of one who fears he has little longer to live, or in the hope that this servant

of the outraged Deity might be able to arrest judgment, Belshazzar promised lavish gifts if he would explain the words. But it was as a staunch servant of the Almighty that, calm and inflexible, Daniel confronted the cringing monarch: "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation."

Fully conscious that he might not leave that hall alive, Daniel nevertheless faced the obligation laid upon him. He told how Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance and pride had brought him down, for "the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men." But far from profiting by the lessons afforded by past events, Belshazzar had steeled his heart against the dictates of conscience. He had wilfully transgressed the laws of right, and to his profligacy and perverse behaviour, he had added the infamous profanation of Jehovah's honour. "Thus," concluded the prophet, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin. God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

The memorable lines of Omar Khayyám fit that occasion:

> "The moving finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

It is the inexorable law of the universe that wilful persistence in sin brings its dire penalty. Yet, it is also true, as these blazers of the trail have made plain, and as the Christian Evangel declares in the fulness of its glad tidings "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The next scene takes place under the régime of Darius. The Median conqueror had reorganized the kingdom, setting up one hundred and twenty satraps to govern the land, over which, in turn, were three presidents. Of these, Daniel was given the premier position. His character and reputation had made him invaluable. Here again a plot is framed to bring him to the dust. Daniel's integrity was a constant annoyance to those who, conceivably, were not averse to taking bribes or using their position for self-aggrandizement. So as there was no hope of indicting him on these grounds, the envious sought his downfall in another direction.

The scheme was crafty in the extreme. By persuading the king to enact a royal statute forbidding a petition to any god or man, for thirty days, on pain of death, Daniel was to be ensnared. It was known that he still persisted in worshipping Jehovah. This decree would, therefore, thrust him on the horns of a dilemma. Either he must disobey the king or abandon his devotions. The former would show him to be of rebellious spirit; the latter, a time-server whose

professed piety was merely a cloak to be discarded when self-interest required it.

We are familiar with what followed. Decree or none, Daniel continued his prayers. He was condemned to the lions in spite of the king's discovery that he was unwittingly a tool to destroy this godly man. But, as in the case of his three compatriots in the furnace, Daniel was divinely preserved. He affirmed this as Darius, in his personal concern for Daniel's safety, came next morning to the lions' den. "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."

The second section of the book, Chapters VII–XII, records various visions which Daniel saw. Enough has been said, however, to afford an adequate idea of the man and his worth, his faith, and its influence. That he conferred incalculable benefits upon those whose temptation was, by adapting themselves to circumstances, to forsake God, is undeniable. He would be a tower of strength to the vacillating and an inspiration to the devout. First there was his loyalty to conscience when that course was costly. This is brought to light again and again. Then there was a superb faith in the co-operation of God with His servants. That in itself was remarkable, when it is remembered that Jehovah was regarded as one whose dwelling was the distant Temple, and that these

exiles were in Babylon. But Daniel's chief distinction was his tenacious hold of the principles that make life great. The blasts of trial could not chill his ardour; the warm sun of popularity could not lure him to betray his trust or abate his endeavours to serve both God and man.

Such an exalted example might well be set before the Hebrew people who, in the turbulent period of the Maccabees, stood in need of its quickening power. But is its effectiveness lost on the present age? Gray was expressing only a half-truth when he said:

> "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

As a matter of fact, its beauty and fragrance make the whole world the richer. And it is positively the case with a man so single in purpose, so strong in a devitalizing environment, so faithful to the right, as Daniel, the daring.

## HAGGAI, THE MASTER-BUILDER

An aged seer who, probably exiled to Babylon, lived to return to Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus. His theme was the restoration of the Temple, a project he successfully inaugurated, B.C. 520.

## *XV. HAGGAI*

If art consists in concealing art, as someone has remarked, then Haggai was an accomplished craftsman. There is perhaps no other prophet that is more direct in his purpose, so pungent in his criticism, and yet so adept at reaching the object aimed at without obtruding either his methods or himself. He tips his arrows with scorn, wings them with sarcasm, and then speeds them skilfully to the mark. There is little, however, in the book enabling us to form an accurate idea of the bowman. Ezra mentions his name in conjunction with Zechariah as ministering to his fellow citizens in Jerusalem. But if, as one reference suggests, Haggai had seen the old Temple in Jerusalem, before the siege and Exile had taken place, then he must have been well advanced in years at the time he spoke; some authorities compute his age as at least eighty years. If he had actually looked on the grandeur of Solomon's Temple, and remembering the solemn seasons when its courts were thronged by eager worshippers, compared the past with what then confronted him, we can understand his impassioned outburst. Moreover, there is that note of urgency we might expect from one who felt his days were numbered. His request that the rebuilding of God's House be undertaken is the more

peremptory, therefore, because he longed intensely to see the work completed before the shadow of the Valley dimmed his sight.

A debatable point presents itself at the outset. According to the book of Ezra it appears that, after the exiles had returned under the liberating decree of Cyrus, they at once erected the altar of burnt offering on the site it had originally occupied, and they proceeded to lay the foundations of a new Temple. That was about B.C. 536. But sixteen years later, we find Haggai enjoining the people to do what had already supposedly been done. Can the discrepancy be explained? Why had there been those years of inactivity if, as Haggai urged, the ruinous state of the Holy House was an insult to the Almighty and a reproach to the nation?

It is probable that both writers were correct. Ezra's account can be fully relied on. In the ecstasy and enthusiasm marking the consummation of so many hopes—the end of that great trek across the intervening wastes—anything could be accomplished. The altar was re-erected, and the foundation-stone of the Temple duly laid amid great rejoicings. Then reaction set in. The captivating scenes painted by a former prophet of the Exile, showing the exuberant joy of Nature as the remnant returned—the mountains and hills breaking forth before them into singing, and the trees of the field clapping their hands—these like the mirage of the desert had faded away.

Now men were grappling with reality. Optimism and resolve, undaunted at first by the gigantic task of clearing the desolate Temple site and building thereon, slowly evaporated. Moreover, their stores of food were woefully depleted. It became a matter of moment to plough the neglected, weed-grown soil, and sow the seed. Then again, inured to hardship though they were they now desired substantial dwellings after the frail tents with which they had had to be content. While their hearts, therefore, wished for some measure of comfort, their hands were full. Thus the Temple project gradually came to a standstill.

This unhappy state of things was in a measure also due to the hostility of Samaria. At first, they had come forward with offers of assistance. These were firmly declined. But that was not as churlish as it seems on the surface. For one thing, the Hebrew people, because of their traditions and their reverence for the Deity, could not accept the help of an alien people. The Samaritans had been settled in the country after the northern kingdom had been subdued and the Ten Tribes deported. There was another reason why such offers were unacceptable. That was largely political. Great care had to be taken not to offend Cyrus, on whose goodwill they depended. Co-operation with Samaria might be viewed by their overlord as an alliance with some ulterior motive. Consequently, the people under Ezra decided to

carry out the scheme unaided. But, as one of the old poets puts it:

> "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

This proved to be the case. The Samaritans caused trouble, not only by misrepresenting the Hebrews to the Persian authorities, but also by numerous raids upon their small possessions.

It is not surprising that, with all these harassments, effort to achieve the apparently hopeless came to an ignominious end. Then, with the passing years, matters took a turn. The stubborn soil began to yield something for the labour expended, although, as we shall see, there were disappointments still to be met. Trade was re-established, and to a limited extent prosperity was again within reach. Order had slowly emerged from chaos. Temporary structures gave place to substantial homes that, as their resources grew, became more ornate. All classes were enamoured of comfort and material possessions. That is not unnatural considering the cramped conditions many had endured in Babylon, for it was only those who had not been fortunate in that land who embraced the chance to return to Jerusalem. They had lost the vision without which the people perish. No higher motive than their own ends moved them. And so, for sixteen years, slowly but surely deterioration had been taking place.

Then came trouble on trouble. A succession of poor seasons followed. Drought damaged the crops. Then mildew and blight attacked what remained in the fields. The depression in agriculture conceivably affected other industries, and trade began to fall off. Meanwhile, a revolution broke out in the Persian empire itself, which had in turn a reflex action upon all the nations comprising it. It was a time of unrest, uncertainty, and disillusionment.

At this critical juncture, Haggai, venerable yet gnarled and strong as a forest oak, stood forth. The fact that he was revered as a link with the historic past gave his words added weight, as did the conviction that God had called him to speak. On that memorable day, "came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet." It was meant for the land at large, but it was addressed principally to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, as the appointed leaders. "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Or, in effect, "The hour is not opportune; there are too many other matters of immediate necessity that we must first take in hand. Business demands attention, money is scarce, our resources are taxed to the full. So, we must submit to circumstances; to restore the Temple is at present beyond our means."

To these supposed excuses, Haggai retorts, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled (panelled)

houses, and this House lie waste?" There may be some scarcity of wealth now, but whence came the comfort and display on all sides? There have been ample means. Only one thing was lacking—the will to work for the restoration of the sanctuary. Why the failure of the crops, the straitened conditions that have displaced the prosperous days enjoyed for so long? It is "because of Mine House that is waste. . . . Therefore, the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit."

Such reasoning is well-based. It is not as naïve as it may appear. Allowing for the fact that it was then customary to attribute every calamity directly to Jehovah, a position indefensible today, there is an underlying truth. Tennyson makes Sir Galahad declare:

> "My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure."

The sullied soul means weakness. The corrupted conscience deprives man of power to do his best and to reach the goal. And this was the purport of Haggai's words. Blessing must be withheld when first things were denied the first place.

We recall with a thrill of pride how another band of forlorn folk comported themselves in a situation almost as trying. The men and women of the *Mayflower*, after being hounded out of their own land, finding temporary shelter in Holland, were thrust

out by the impelling of God. Reaching that bleak, inhospitable coast of New England, they too must break up the virgin soil or starve. They had to clear the ground and erect their homes. But they were ever mindful that God's House must be built. In spite of their high allegiance, notwithstanding the word of promise "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee," incredible hardships compassed them. Their crops failed. Sickness depleted their numbers and sapped their strength. Their dead were buried by stealth in unmarked graves lest the unfriendly Redman should learn their plight. Yet their intrepid spirit was untamed. Their heroism moves the soul even of the indifferent. Such fortitude culminated at last in immortal achievement. They needed no Haggai to rebuke or urge. Faith in the blessings which righteousness brings, gratitude to the good Father whose compassion was their stay, filled them with ardent resolve to requite His love, and to hand on to posterity honour untarnished by selfish aims, and the fadeless heritage of a noble tradition.

It is only fair to the men of Judah to say that a few may have argued that religion could exist without a visible Sanctuary. That had been demonstrated during the Exile. No sacred place was theirs, no stately shrine hallowed by the prayers and sacrifices of centuries. Nor was Jehovah limited to temples made with hands. They had found Him nigh to the contrite, a present help to the troubled, the guide

and guard of the confiding. There, the supposed necessity for rebuilding the Temple, which to them was no longer the sole dwelling-place of God, was open to question. That was not, however, the position of the majority, nor the matter as Haggai viewed it. Hence his objurgations and his appeal to the best instincts of the nation. The prophet's stinging protests could not be treated lightly. Both Zerubbabel and Joshua were deeply impressed. They inaugurated a movement to remove the disgrace they now felt to be insupportable. With alacrity, the people accepted their leadership, and satisfaction gleamed in Haggai's face as he noted the effect of his words. So with the firm affirmation that the Lord was with them as they took up the abandoned work to carry it through to splendid completion, he strengthened their arms.

The second prophecy was uttered about a month later. Progress had been made with the Temple, although enthusiasm was once more beginning to wane. To goad them to fuller activity, Haggai drew a comparison between what had been and what then was. "Who is left among you that saw this House in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? . . . Yet now be strong!" Not only was God's blessing promised, furthering their endeavours, but also there was the unchanging One Himself as their sure stay. The Covenant still stood. Jehovah had linked them to Him from the days of Egypt; He would not fail

them now if they would comply with His just decrees. And insignificant though the new building might appear compared with the former, the gifts of their penury should surpass those of Solomon's affluence. Moreover, the wealth of the nations was later to flow towards it and be its portion, and within its walls should grace be found.

The third prophecy, some three months afterwards, deals with the question of incurring pollution or imparting holiness. There is a further hint here that interest in the Temple was flagging again. The people were lukewarm. And he sought the cause of such disquieting symptoms. Perhaps fear of terrible consequences if they did not restore the building, or national pride touched to the quick, had prompted a response at first. But something had vitiated their service. Were their hearts moved to undertake this task in thankfulness to the God of heaven? Or did they grudge the time and substance thus expended? They had only to remember how, in other directions, toiling without the blessing of Jehovah, the work of their hands had remained uncrowned with the looked-for results.

That same day, a further word was intrusted to Haggai. This was specifically for Zerubbabel. He was a descendant of David, and, as the records show, he had proved loyal to the best traditions. Had there been diminished zeal for God's House? Not on his part. Had there been any unwillingness to

follow the commands of the Highest, as conveyed by His messenger? Not as far as Zerubbabel was concerned. He had been alert and willing, so a larger sphere of usefulness should be accorded him. Thrones might topple to destruction. This dynasty and that might suffer extinction, but it should not be so of his line. With its Messianic implications, the divine promise was given to him. "In that day, saith the Lord of Hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, My servant . . . and will make thee as a signet (the emblem of deputed authority and of honour); for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of Hosts."

So the work of Haggai comes to an abrupt termination as far as the book itself goes. Whether he lived to see his hopes realized with the completion of the Temple in the sixth year of Darius, is undetermined. Yet that is not the point. His duty was to take the scattered embers of national pride and piety and, with his inspired breath, kindle the flame anew. The actual building belonged to other hands. He fulfilled his allotted task. Without dazzling metaphors and brilliant similes, without rhetorical art or device, he spoke to the needs of the hour. He moved men with his sincerity and directness; his words culminated in action. Is there any greater test of oratory? If Demosthenes declared that true speech demanded action, action, and again action, we have it in Haggai's influence upon his hearers. It was not action on the part of the prophet—no animation of face nor

compelling gesture—but ready co-operation with God on the part of all.

With convincing force, Haggai still speaks to us. As the Master said, a man may heap up treasure but lose his soul. And on the personal and national planes, first things must come first. If the Sanctuary, and the rightful place of God in life, be crowded out by material considerations, we are getting our wealth at too great a cost. We may be gaining much; we are losing more. And the loss is incalculable. There is, however, this note of encouragement. No true labour for God can fail of its reward. Progress may be slow, and discouragements abound. That must not occasion dismay. We must see that fidelity to the appointed duty characterizes the life, and then, with the firm confidence of Whittier, we can say:

"All is of God that is, and is to be;
And God is good. Let this suffice us still
Resting in childlike trust upon His will
Who moves to His great ends unthwarted by the ill."

## ZECHARIAH, THE ENTHUSIAST

Born in Chaldæa, Zechariah saw Jerusalem for the first time when he travelled with the repatriated exiles. He furthered Haggai's advocacy of rebuilding the Temple. His Messianic prophecy was strikingly fulfilled.

## *XVI. ZECHARIAH*

Zechariah was as different from Haggai as two men could well be. They had only one thing in common: a passionate enthusiasm for the restoration of the Temple. While Haggai was old, conscious that time was speeding by with winged feet, and that, therefore, he must speak straight to the point, Zechariah was youthful. The aged man was prosaic and practical; the younger, poetical and idealistic, indulging in colourful word-pictures, and yet insisting on deeds as the paramount necessity. From this it will be noted that both prophets approached the situation by individual paths. Each had received the divine anointing, but the Spirit of God ever utilizes the peculiar gifts of a man's personality, fusing them into one master-instrument for the purpose in view. While Haggai prophesied from the sixth to the ninth month of B.C. 520, Zechariah began his work in the eighth month and went on at intervals for several years.

That depression, to which we alluded in the previous chapter, still overspread the nation's skies, darkening the face of day, and the young prophet was affected by it. But the apathy that resulted was inconceivable to one of his temperament. He belonged to the sacred caste, Iddo, a priest who had

returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel, being probably his grandfather. Born in exile, Zechariah had come up with the caravans to Jerusalem. There he beheld all that remained of the Temple, that centre of holy memories and solemn worship, and also the visible dwelling of Jehovah. While it lay desolate, it was a reproach to the religion Judah professed. Worse still, it meant to him that the presence of God in the midst of His people could not be enjoyed. He consecrated his strength to secure the great object that Haggai had so strenuously advocated, and threw himself wholeheartedly into the project. Buoyant and zealous, he had the soul of an artist and the eyes of a seer. That comes out in the figurative and picturesque mould in which his prophecy is cast. It is not a reversion from the concise and direct speech of Haggai. The younger man merely availed himself of the oriental love of imagery. He made commonplace duty luminous with the light of his genius. Where the mind had lost its ability to receive stimulus from a plain statement of facts, the warmth of Zechariah's soul would be felt. So against the drab background of disillusionment, he paints his canvas in striking colours.

Zechariah was just as eager as Haggai that the work should be carried out, though his line of action was different. Dreaming may precede doing, as in the case of the poet, sculptor, artist, and reformer, but achievement is the real goal. Moreover, there is a

deep-flowing Messianic strain underlying his message. This gave him confidence that what he urged was in line with God's destiny for the nation. In fact, the fulfilment of those hopes was contingent on the people's willingness to rebuild the House. He utters neither condemnation nor rebuke. Out of the fulness of his love for God and the House of his fathers, he speaks words of inspiration to the hesitant and the apathetic, stressing ready and cheerful co-operation as the path to success. Isaiah had foreseen the renewed prestige of Judah as an accomplished fact when Assyria should be vanquished; Zechariah held that such "a consummation devoutly to be wished" depended on the Temple's completion. Then Jehovah would be there at hand to bless and protect. Freed from fear of her foes, purged from her sins, happy and fruitful days were in store for the chosen race.

Keeping this in mind, the book of the prophet becomes more intelligible and interesting. It is divided into three sections: The call to penitent faith; eight visions of distinctive appeal; and the divine pledge for the future. With dignity of utterance, and the authority of one speaking in God's name, the prophet calls his fellow-men to the better way. "Turn ye unto Me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you." Then through the angelic intermediary who now appears, judgment is declared on those who had humiliated Jerusalem and laid

waste her borders. Let the Holy City heed the voice of the Almighty, making the Temple once more fit for His habitation, and "the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet chose Jerusalem."

The visions now follow. These have been described as a projection of the mind or a creation of the imagination, by which, in a state of trance or more probably a brooding concentration on events, facts and ideas are combined and bodied forth in new forms. Or, as Sir George Adam Smith puts it, "A series of conscious and artistic allegories—the deliberate translation into a carefully constructed symbolism of the divine truths with which the prophet was entrusted by his God." Zechariah sees four horsemen, mounted on chargers of varied colours, who meet by a grove of myrtle trees. They have been acting as patrols, and now come to report that the earth is temporarily at peace. Then four horns, symbolic of the aggressive world-powers that had fought against human welfare, are seen. But there are also four smiths, raised up to shatter them, signifying the passing of brute force. Over against this, is seen the enlivening figure of a man with a measuring line. What was his purpose? To survey Jerusalem, preparatory to vast development. She was to spread far beyond the confines of her old walls, and instead of that former protection, the Lord would be not only the glory in the midst of her, but also as a wall of fire roundabout.

The fourth vision touches spiritual renewal. Joshua, the high priest, as the representative of the nation, is arraigned before the angel. Satan, the adversary, stands as accuser. And the filthy robes of Joshua, emblematic of national wrong-doing and disobedience, suggest that punishment was to be meted out. A place must be made, however, for divine mercy and human repentance. God seeks reclamation, not retribution. Penitence had opened the way to purification. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" A change of raiment, the token of forgiveness and reinstatement, as in Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son, is bestowed upon Joshua. And as the fair mitre is set upon his head, the promise is given that if he will walk in God's ways, the good shall be but a precursor of the best—the Branch on which the fruits of Messianic hopes shall ripen, shall come forth.

A massive candlestick of gold, with seven lamps fed from one bowl is next seen. The astonished eyes of Zechariah note that two olive trees stand on each side of it. Unable to comprehend the vision, he listens to the lyrical outburst of the angel. "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the

word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel."

An explanation of the symbols is then given. The olive trees, feeding the lamps are the two sons of oil, referring most likely to Joshua, as the anointed of God, and Zerubbabel. The priestly and kingly are the channels for the divine grace. Thus the lamps typifying Judah are to be supplied, and Judah fulfil her dual function of giving light and bearing witness to the unseen Spirit.

A roll of parchment of colossal size is seen flying through the air. This represented the record of iniquities perpetrated by the people. The curse of sin would fall rapidly upon the wrong-doer, and the righteous wrath of God none could escape.

The seventh vision shows the prophet a large seven-gallon measure, shaped like a barrel in which a woman, personifying Wickedness, had been placed. A heavy plate of lead was then fixed as a lid to the ephah. The measure was carried by two winged women to distant Babylonia, thus showing vividly how evil was to be banished from Judah's borders. The last vision revealed four chariots moving out from two brazen mountains. As in the first vision, the

horses were of different colours—chestnut, black, white, and dappled bay. They represented the four winds of heaven, powerful, cleansing, destructive, and betokened judgment on the guilty nations, especially Babylon who had brought Israel almost to desperation.

Following these revelations, Zechariah deals with a number of practical points touching on the place of fasts and mourning, urging the people to execute righteousness and to share with one another the tolerance and love God had shown to them all. He pictures the happy days shortly to come by describing venerable age and boisterous youth. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts." Labour's reward would be the fertility of the land, and rejoicing and thankfulness should abound.

After a silence of two years, Zechariah again pronounces the divine sentence on the heathen. Then in a sublime passage he describes the coming of the Messianic king, riding upon a lowly ass into Jerusalem. The fate of the tyrant was sealed, and his reign must inevitably come to an end. But the

Messiah's power was for all time. "His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river (Euphrates) even to the ends of the earth." The Lord of hosts would be the redeemer of His people who, cleansed and sanctified, should boast themselves in the unfailing Helper. A fountain was to be opened for sin and for uncleanness. The people, refined as silver and tried as gold in the hour of testing, would be saved. Holiness unto the Lord would hallow both the sacred vessels of the Temple and those of the home. And in deliverance and restoration, the nation would find abiding gladness.

As we examine the prophecy, we note how far Zechariah ranges in quest of figures and metaphors. Nature yields the myrtle trees, fig, vine, and olives, the firs, cedars, and oaks. The wings of a stork, the whirlwind, the strong forest and young lions, are all suggestive. That he was well acquainted with men's vocations is patent. The measuring line and plummet of the builder appear; the engraved stone and candlestick, the silver and gold fashioned into a crown, speak of the craftsman in metals; while the shepherd and husbandman also find a place in his pages. His poetical mind framed flashing phrases. He writes of an arrow like lightning in its speed, a brand plucked from the burning, a sea of affliction, and mountains of brass; and to denote the resources of a forgiven people, he speaks of "silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets." Jehovah is

to him One who is jealous of the nation's integrity, sore displeased with iniquity, yet tender and gracious; not offended and aloof, but entreating the love of His own that He may take His rightful place in their lives.

But Zechariah's prophecy concerning the Messiah stirs the soul. The memorable scene of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is prefigured. And what is more, there are several instances in which the similarity between some of Zechariah's words and those found in the Gospels cannot be missed. For example, there are the references to the vine and also to the shepherd which Jesus filled with heavenly meaning. "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver," says the prophet, "and I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the House of the Lord"—a remarkable parallel to what is associated with Judas. Again, "I was wounded in the house of my friends" finds its counterpart in the words used by Jesus. "He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me." And a direct quotation is found in the fourth Gospel: "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." The heavenly King was described as "just, having salvation," and Peter says, "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." There is also in Zechariah "by the blood of Thy covenant," matched by "through the blood of the everlasting covenant," in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

It must be admitted that, although the Temple was finished and worship restored, all the envisioned good did not actually flow to Judah at that time. She was still a vassal, and remorseless foes menaced her borders. No great influx of heathen peoples came to share the benefits of Jehovah's presence, nor were lavish gifts forthcoming. Even the Davidic line sank gradually into deeper obscurity. Then the prophet's words were unsubstantiated? Not so. Bending himself to human needs, Zechariah brought light to bear on the requirements of the hour. He comforted men with thoughts of God's clemency and regard for the people of His choice. But he did even more—more than he could measure. He proclaimed the coming of that golden era when God's promises would be realized. And until the Messiah should be manifest, Zechariah was preparing the road along which the celestial King would ride in solemn grandeur to His place in human souls. Unfulfilled in its entirety as yet, the believing can look with joyous anticipation to the day when the spiritual Zion shall be built up, the throne of our Lord established, and His dominion extend from sea to sea.

# JOEL, THE PROPHET OF CONSOLATION

No particulars are available regarding either the prophet or his period, but his date is generally given as lying between B.C. 410 and B.C. 350. His confidence that out of evil good would come is the basis of his appeal for reformation.

## *XVII. JOEL*

The prophet Joel presents another enigma. All we know of him, except that which may be legitimately inferred from his work, is contained in the opening of the book, namely, that he was the son of Pethuel. It has been thought by some that he was a priest. This is due to his interest in the Temple, for in three places he speaks of the daily sacrifices having ceased. He also enjoins the priests to clothe themselves with sackcloth; later to sanctify a fast and call a solemn assembly to make intercession for the divine favour. It is conceivable, however, that a pious Hebrew might revere the Temple and the things for which it stood without necessarily belonging to the sacred order. Moreover, his intimate knowledge of agricultural conditions, his explicit references to those who worked on the land, his ideas taken from warfare, and the numerous allusions to Nature at large, betoken a man in close contact with the life of the people, rather than one in some degree isolated as a priest would be.

Considerable difficulty is found in attempting to place Joel chronologically. Either he prophesied at a very early date, perhaps, during the reign of Joash, before either Syria or Assyria had appeared on the

horizon as belligerent and despotic powers, or else his work must have followed the restoration of the Temple and rebuilding of the walls. The main body of scholarship inclines to the latter view. It is unwise to argue from a negation, but the fact that there is no mention of the northern kingdom of Israel leads us to suppose that it had long before passed out of existence. The absence of any condemnation, such as is found in the pre-exilic prophets, is another salient fact. An important point is the similarity of Joel's thought with that of some who went before him, about whose date there is little question. Joel's style is elegant and rhythmical. While he has his message to deliver, he draws frequently on the other writings and about twenty parallels have been noted between his book and the recorded work of his predecessors.

A dreadful visitation of locusts followed by a drought gave Joel an opportunity of speaking a word that was illustrated by recent events. His theme is the day of the Lord. With bold strokes he describes the assault of the locusts, with the attendant misery which both man and beast suffered. The countryside was stripped clean of vegetation. Desolation had swept with pitiless hand over cornfield, vineyard, and orchard. Even the Temple services were affected. Thus he summoned the priests first of all, and then every inhabitant to an act of humiliation and supplication. "The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down;

for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O Lord, to Thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath devoured all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto Thee; for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness." This catastrophe is, in the prophet's view, the just penalty of Judah's infidelity or indifference. He looks aghast at the onslaught of the plague. "The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Before their face the people shall be much pained; all faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: neither shall one thrust another, they shall walk every one in his path; and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw

their shining; and the Lord shall utter His voice before His army; for His camp is very great; for He is strong that executeth His word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." The prophet is certain, however, that God is merciful. Let there be repentance. "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."

So the nation is called to God. The promise is given that the pestilence shall pass, and that fruitfulness shall once more cause the land to rejoice. What is more, the people would know that Jehovah was in the midst, their helper and stay. In a rousing passage, reaching the peaks of prophetic power, the out pouring of the Holy Spirit is foretold. It would be a time of revival and quickening. Dreams of past glories would gladden the hearts of the aged, and visions of future attainment gird the young for new effort. While the day of judgment was coming to those who had previously tormented Israel, yet for the Lord's elect Jerusalem would afford safe refuge. The nations are arraigned. Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, are called to account for the prisoners they had taken, their rapacity, the silver and gold they had carried away. The Omnipotent, with awful irony, bids

these ancient foes who have transgressed His commandments, bring their rebellion to a head. Let them, reversing the word of Isaiah, beat their ploughshares into swords and their pruninghooks into spears. The most they can do will prove their impotence. It may be well for the evil-doer up to a point. The strong may prey upon the weak, and the godless bring wicked devices to pass. But there is a limit to the patience of Jehovah. Merciful though He is in character, He is also Master of the universe. "The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more." Egypt, the old-time oppressor that had laid its fetters on Israel long before, and Edom that had laughed at Israel's misfortune, goading her almost to madness with taunts, were also to come to the bar. God's honour would be cleared, and the cause of His people held high before their former adversaries.

Apart from the literary merits of the book, Joel's work is noteworthy for its insight. While Jehovah permits tribulation, it is only that good may be the outcome. "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and

rejoice in the Lord your God; for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, My great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and My people shall never be ashamed." Yet to those who have defied His rule and questioned His authority, He is the terrible One mighty in His acts, challenging their vaunted strength, and showing Himself to be the arbiter of destiny. So while Joel commences his work where the vapours of mysterious providences hang like mists obscuring the path, he guides the believing along the tortuous track that leads to the radiance-flooded plateau "to which our God Himself is moon and sun."

The sincere teacher is revealed in the tone and temper of Joel's work. He sees the eternal reflected in the temporal. The injustice and wrongs endured that seem in themselves to disprove God's benevolent aims are, in reality, proof of the exact opposite. It is because His purpose is unvarying, His love without limit that, out of every disastrous experience, good may be extracted. Whilst we might alter what the

prophet deemed as direct acts of God to the indirect, what was apparently "sent" to things permitted, that does not invalidate the meaning which the prophet points out. Through the lessons life teaches, God educates the soul. His provision may be, for a time, curtailed. But, after the tempest comes tranquillity, after scarcity renewed plenty. Thus the entire circle of human experience, with its joys and sorrows, its humour and pathos, while enclosing man cannot exclude his heavenly Father.

So with a deepened knowledge of God's paternal regard, a clearer idea of human worth, Joel speaks reassuringly both to his own race, and to those of this generation, perplexed yet aspiring, harassed yet hoping for fuller accord with God's will. Unwavering trust cannot fail of its reward for:

> "The ills we see,
> The mysteries of sorrow deep and long,
> The dark enigmas of permitted wrong,
> Have all one key:
> This strange, sad world is but our Father's school;
> All chance and change His love shall grandly overrule."

## MALACHI, THE PURITAN

Arrayed against a polluted priesthood and a corrupt laity, Malachi followed the work commenced by Ezra and Nehemiah. His courage denotes a man of conviction and unbending probity. With him and Joel, prophecy comes to an end. Both are striking examples of those described by St. Peter, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

## *XVIII. MALACHI*

Possibly the last amongst these blazers of the trail, as far as the Old Testament Canon goes, Malachi is the most elusive. We have no details about the man himself. It is even doubtful if "Malachi" was his name, for the word means "the messenger," and the prophet hid his identity under this guise. But whatever the case, it does not affect the summons God sent to him, nor can it modify the unbridled scorn with which he regarded the iniquities of men in high places and the instability of Judah's life.

The swiftest way is sometimes the circuitous. By that we mean, that to understand the man and his message it is advisable to read around them as well as to peruse the prophecy itself. For while there are many things we do not know about the prophet, this much can be deduced: he lived in days pregnant with grave possibilities. The Temple had been completed in B.C. 516, but apart from the general state of discontent resulting from deferred hopes, we have only scanty information regarding internal affairs. On the larger stage of the nations, however, events of a far-reaching nature were taking place. And here, secular history—the longer way round of which we spoke—brings us towards the facts. A titanic drama destined to change the face of the

world was being enacted. Persia was at death-grips with a well-equipped foe, namely, Greece. In B.C. 490, Miltiades met the Persian forces at Marathon, where he dealt them a shattering blow under which they reeled. Ten years later the battle of Thermopylæ, rendered famous by the heroic stand of the three hundred Spartans, was fought, followed by the destruction of the Persian fleet at Salamis. The next year saw the Greeks again victorious at Platæa. As a result, Xerxes, king of Persia, lost Europe and his Ionian possessions. While in B.C. 460, a powerful alliance was formed between Greece and Egypt to break, for all time, the detested dominion of Persia.

It will therefore be seen that this period, leading up to Ezra's visit to Jerusalem in B.C. 458, had been momentous. The influence of this struggle, like the concentric circles caused by a stone flung into a placid lake, moved far beyond the centre of the disturbance. Judah was bound to feel it. For one thing she was, as we have already said, in the mire of self-pity. The luminous dreams of renewed splendour that had filled her mind had been dissipated. The promises she had leaned on seemed a mockery. Peace and security were further off than ever, and even the ceremonial demands of the Temple had become irksome. Standards were lowered. Heathen modes of life, sanctioned by the usage of fifty years, formed a rut into which it was easy to slip. Intermarriage with

non-Jewish tribes became common, and the high call of duty fell on deaf ears. The ideal had faded and the people were easy prey for the tempter.

This was the state of things when, years before Malachi's ministry, Ezra, the priest and scribe, still resident in Babylon, asked permission from the king to go to Jerusalem on a tour of inspection. His request was granted. Not only were gifts from the royal treasury entrusted to Ezra for the Temple, but also instructions were issued to the Persian officials in Jerusalem to provide him with any funds he might require. Nearly two thousand Jews who had not availed themselves of the decree of Cyrus, decided to accompany him, with the object of settling in Palestine as their fathers had already done, and the cavalcade set out.

On his arrival, Ezra was dismayed by the conditions he found. His attention was called to the marriages that had taken place, whereby the stock was being robbed of its distinctive character and religion undermined. With promptness he grappled with the situation. In this he was supported by a small group zealous for reform. Within three days a public gathering was held, and a body of elders commissioned to report on the facts. Those who had married foreign women were commanded to sever their unlawful unions. But here Ezra met with difficulty. A number of the priests and Levites were guilty of intermarriage, and they were not amenable

to discipline. In addition to his activities along these lines, Ezra attempted to reorganize the Temple worship and to rebuild Jerusalem's defences. In all these matters, however, he met with stout opposition from various quarters, and for several years little was accomplished.

Reinforcement came at length from an unexpected source. Nehemiah who occupied the office of cup-bearer to Artaxerxes had received news of the unhappy state of his compatriots in Jerusalem, and obtaining leave of absence, and also the king's authority, he journeyed to Jerusalem. He was appointed as the temporary governor and proceeded at once to rebuild the ruined walls. His writings record the hostility of Sanballat and others. But notwithstanding all his enemies did, he so infused his spirit into the hearts of the discouraged people that the walls were restored within fifty-two days. There were other problems awaiting solution. Poverty, due to bad times and the demoralized life of the community, held many in its grip. Small holdings had been mortgaged for food or to pay taxes. Some of the people had even sold their children as slaves. Embitterment had been added to dispiritedness. With consecrated energy, Nehemiah immediately called a representative assembly together. He persuaded certain of the wealthy to remit the debts owed by their poorer fellows, and compelled others to modify the rates of interest they were extorting.

At this time Ezra came out of retirement to read once more the Book of the Law to the multitude. The effect was almost beyond belief. A national movement of repentance and readjustment began, the people also pledging themselves anew to serve Jehovah with true allegiance to His will. Foreign defensive compacts were disavowed. The Sabbath was once more sanctified, and it was decreed that no business should henceforth be transacted on that day. Moreover, a fixed sum for the support of public worship was individually agreed upon.

At the expiration of his leave of absence, Nehemiah was compelled to return to his duties. Twelve years elapsed before he was able to revisit Jerusalem, and during that time, his magnetic personality and firm hand withdrawn, declension more serious than before set in. The old abuses suppressed so rigorously had sprung up again. It was then that Malachi was anointed by the Holy Spirit to take up arms for the right.

His style of preaching is peculiarly his own, but still very effective. He asks pertinent questions of the people, and then, without waiting for an answer, he settles them himself. He voices objections, presumably on the tip of the nation's tongue, and proceeds to use them to the discomfiture of those whose laxity and lack of scruple he assails. God's unwearied regard for Israel is the ground of Malachi's appeal. Jehovah was their Father. If that

were forgotten, the priests were to blame. The prevalent godlessness lay at their door, for they were the supposed leaders of the soul. Yet their service had been both perfunctory and poor. Worship had lost its savour, and Sabbath desecration, the offering of unworthy oblations, and the general lowering of tone, were due almost entirely to professionalism in their ranks. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master, if then I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts." The name of Jehovah was sacred, but the priests had profaned it among the Gentiles. They had openly winked at wrong-doing, had condoned the presentation of blemished sacrifices and so, Malachi threatened, unless they would lay it to heart, a curse would come upon them. They were meant to be servants of the Most High; but they had caused many to stumble, had corrupted the Covenant, and had given countenance to heathen practices. Under this scathing rebuke the hol-

lowness and pretence of the priesthood were laid bare.

In the second part of the book, Malachi turned to his fellows. They plumed themselves on the Covenant as their most cherished possession, but failed to live up to the privileges it conferred. Marriage with aliens was bad enough in itself, but in this they were guilty of an offence against both God and man. "The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion." The prophet's meaning is clear. The land was impoverished. A marriage, therefore, with women of other tribes, particularly Samaria, offered not only novelty and youth, but also material resources. The probability is that the women of a people long settled in neighbouring provinces would bring with them a substantial dowry. To this temptation many of the Hebrews had succumbed, and social as well as religious problems resulted.

Malachi went on to speak of the divine One who should come. He would be like a refiner and purifier of silver. Through the fire of judgment must all pass that their impurities might be removed. Those who had preyed upon the land—sorcerers, idolators, and false swearers, as well as the oppressor of the hireling, the widow and fatherless, would be consumed. But there is more than remonstrance on Malachi's lips; he calls the land to repentance.

Some naturally took offence at Malachi's presentation of the facts. When he bade them return, they asked truculently, "Wherein shall we return?" He meets the question with unsparing frankness of speech. It is as though Jehovah Himself addressed them. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts."

They had spoken against God. Worship had become burdensome even as rectitude seemed profitless. There was, however, a religious section in the community. For them blessing was sure. A book of remembrance—giving hint of the Lamb's Book of Life, in the Apocalypse—was written "for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." They were to be as jewels, as a peculiar treasure, safeguarded by Jehovah's arm. While the day of

recompense would come for the wicked, to those that feared Him the Sun of Righteousness would arise with healing in His wings. The second Elijah was foreshadowed who would usher in the time when the heart of the fathers should be turned to the children, and the children to their fathers.

Summarily as the prophecy closes, Malachi's object is clearly defined. Bidding the people to remember and acknowledge the blessings bestowed on them, the high estate from which they had fallen, they were summoned to contrition and alignment with the holy will of God that in returning forgiveness might be theirs.

Such was the ministry of Malachi. If he lacked the originality and insight of some of the former prophets, he certainly possessed power to enter the lists with evil, and to wrestle against entrenched abuses. Undismayed by his adversaries, with indomitable bravery Malachi girded himself for what the hour might bring forth. He feared no man because he feared God so much. With rapier thrust, he struck home. Skilfully he stripped off the hypocritical vesture with which priestly hands had decked the skeleton of wickedness. And thankless though his task might be, he faced scorn and antagonism, sure that only through God could the race find serenity and strength. Has the modern world wisdom enough to heed still this brave messenger of the Almighty?

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Thus in these character studies we have endeavoured not only to place the prophets in their historic setting, but also to set forth the individual contribution that each made to the spiritual development of the race. They differ from one another in temperament, mode of approach, and endowment, but while there are diversities of gifts, there is one Spirit. These fiery and valorous souls, under that divine inspiration, blazed the trail. They prepared the path along which the Son of God came to redeem the world, and as we tread in His steps, we also shall find that divine Lord, whom to know is life eternal.

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